

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal
CONDUCTED BY
CHARLES DICKENS

NO 850 NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 1885.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

LADY LOVELACE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "JUDITH WYNNE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

COLONEL WICKHAM took Phil's telegram in his hand, and went off at once with it to the Hall.

"Now, Edie shall give me an explanation; I won't go without one," he said, as he made his way over the frosty tangle of the shrubbery, in and out among the bare brown hazel-rods.

But when the Colonel reached the Hall he found that Edie had not made her appearance that morning, pleading as an excuse a bad headache.

"Come in and have some breakfast, Wickham," called the Squire to him, as he heard the Colonel's voice outside in the hall. "The truth of it is, the barometer is low—very low this morning, the atmosphere is uncommonly heavy, and we may have a gale before night." Then he added in subdued tones as Colonel Wickham came into the breakfast-room: "My own opinion is that Edie and Phil haven't hit it off at all lately. However, I don't see that you or I will mend matters by interfering—best let them alone, and they'll right themselves."

Colonel Wickham, however, was not disposed to view things in quite so cheery a light. It seemed to him that matters at that moment called not only for interference, but for interference of a strenuous and energetic sort. He declined the Squire's invitation to breakfast, and announced his intention of running up to London to say a few words to Phil.

The Squire laughed and shook his head.

"Better let them alone, Wickham; they'll make it up right enough," he said.

"Why, bless my soul! we shall have

enough to do if we interfere in all the quarrels they'll have between now and their wedding-day!"

Colonel Wickham, however, held to his purpose.

"Phil and I must have a reckoning together," he said to himself—not to the Squire—so he caught the next London train, and arrived at Phil's hotel somewhere late in the afternoon.

It may be questioned whether the reckoning Colonel Wickham was to have with Phil could be heavier than the one Phil was having with himself at that very moment.

Edie's note had fallen like the crash of a thunderbolt at his feet. It startled him at first almost out of his senses—he was prepared for any amount of refractoriness and playful teasing, but not for a letter written in this strain with a sledge-hammer for a pen—the next moment it appeared to him a positive revelation. In its light he seemed to see, understand, and be able to piece together into coherence all Edie's wild vagaries and apparently inconsequential sayings and doings.

That was what it had meant all along. When she had been so anxious to suspend their engagement for a time, it must have been her own heart, not his, she was thinking of; when she had coquetted, and played, and trifled with him, it had not been from mere girlish lightness of heart, but because her fancy must have been veering from one man to the other; and now it had settled, and no doubt permanently, upon the one most to its taste.

Who that one was, naturally was the next question that arose. A question, however, that Phil had scarce asked himself before he had answered it. There could be but one answer to it, as certainly as there had been but one man beside

himself at Stanham for whom Edie had ever shown the slightest predilection. That man was Colonel Wickham. And here-upon Phil fell to torturing himself by recalling a whole world of words and looks Edie had from time to time bestowed upon his uncle, winding up with that memorable evening when she had gone into a flirtation with the Colonel, and he—Phil—had turned upon her with the question, "Was she making up her mind to be his aunt?"

The matter did not admit of a doubt, it seemed to him.

"The next thing I shall hear will be that they are going to be married, I suppose," he said to himself savagely.

Under circumstances such as these, the first thing a man generally longs for is a revolver, with exactly three bullets—one for the woman who has played him false, another for the man who has led her on to do it, the third for himself. Phil experienced to the full this generic feeling of the race. He had his share of the passions organic alike in saint and sinner. He kept them down, in a measure, and after the first fierceness of his passion had blazed itself out, his mood changed, there fell a great bitterness of spirit upon him. He scoffed at the whole race of women. They never had been, and never would be, capable of a grand, true passion such as men were in the habit of wasting upon them—the more fools they!—of a passion which, once fixed, could never veer, but must end only with life itself.

And then he scoffed at himself and his own heart for having been simple enough to pin his life's happiness on the faith of a little girl of eighteen. How could he have been idiotic enough to expect to be treated differently from the rest of mankind?

Well, thank Heaven, he had learnt his lesson for life. It would never need to be repeated. Henceforth women would be to him what they were to most men of the world—nothing more, nothing less—just creatures to toy with, to flirt with, to amuse oneself with, and occasionally to marry if convenience demanded it, and the creature were exceptionally well-looking.

This mood would in due course, no doubt, give place to another, in which Phil's better self would once more get the upper hand; but it held sway for a tolerably long period, and helped to push things a little faster downhill than they were already going. Under its influence,

he spent two long mornings in Ellinor Yorke's society—mornings during which, to say the least, his conduct was remarkable and his manner pronounced.

That is to say, he went headlong into the wildest, maddest of flirtations a man could be capable of. Ellinor's soft, languid glances he returned with long, steady, expressive ones. "She evidently likes to be looked at; why shouldn't I look?" was the argument he used in defence of this misconduct of his eyes; to be supplemented later on by another plea of like kind: "She likes to be flirted with; why shouldn't I flirt? It's an equal game; we are neither of us handicapped by that foolish thing called a heart."

If an equal game, it was, however, also a dangerous game, as Phil, before it was over, was to find out. Lucy looked on, a little puzzled and a little frightened at what she felt sure must in some sort be the result of her own handiwork. When she had penned her letter to Edie, it had seemed to her that she was doing an act all but heroic in its daring and defiance of the conventionalities of life. Results of some sort, of necessity she had expected, but scarcely such immediate and tempestuous results as these. She had thought it possible he might come round and see them; tell the story of his lovemaking with the little girl at Stanham; how heartlessly she had played her game of fast and loose; how thankful he was to get his liberty back again. And then, in due course, no doubt, he would once more have resigned his liberty—this time into the loyal and tender keeping of Ellinor. But, as it was, "in due course" were words that seemed to have no meaning for him.

Getting back to his hotel from one of these wild, reckless, lovemaking mornings, Phil was met by the waiter with the news that Colonel Wickham was waiting to see him—had been waiting, in fact, for more than an hour and a half.

"He's been a standing like a statue at the window, with a pencil in his hand, the whole hour and a half, sir," pursued the friendly waiter as Phil made his way upstairs.

Now this was an exaggeration; a quarter of an hour was the outside limit of Colonel Wickham's statue-like attitude; a quarter of an hour which, when Phil entered, had not quite run itself out. Burdened as the Colonel's mind was with the heaviest anxieties, with the arrangement of affairs which before anything else demanded a

clear brain and a light hand, he had nevertheless found it impossible to resist the force of old habits and associations. This room—for the nonce Phil's sitting-room—he had occupied annually for the past fifteen or twenty years during his periodical visits to London, and at one of its windows he had also annually taken some most interesting notes for his book of metropolitan statistics. The said book, on a certain page, showed the exact amount of traffic that passed along a certain street leading off the Strand during a quarter of an hour of the busiest time of day: how many foot-passengers, how many travellers in hansom and other cabs, how many waggons, carts, or carriages. At the end of every seven years these returns had been balanced against increased population in the metropolis, and the result showed in interesting figures at the foot of the page.

Phil, when he saw his uncle's watch on the window-ledge beside him, and the pencil and note-book in his hand, knew exactly what process of calculation was going on, and that nothing short of an earthquake must be allowed to interrupt it. It did not add to the serenity of his temper to have to stand silent and unoccupied for exactly three and a half minutes. He walked across to the mantelpiece, leaned his long arms among the spill-cases and candlesticks, and took a steady survey of himself in the looking-glass.

"What a confounded hang-dog appearance I have this morning!" he thought; "look as if I had not been in bed for a month;" and then he lifted his eyes a little higher, and found that his uncle had put away his note-book and pencil, and now stood looking over his shoulder at the self-same reflection.

Evidently with the same thought in his mind, for as Phil turned round to shake hands his first question was, "So you've been keeping late hours—eh?" then without waiting for Phil's reply, he plunged into his subject at once with, "I suppose you have been expecting to see me, Phil, and can guess pretty well what I've come to talk about?"

Phil was ready for him.

"I am delighted to see you," he answered. "Now I can have the pleasure of personally congratulating you."

It was said sarcastically, cruelly, in a tone that Phil did not often use, and with a look in his blue eyes which his uncle, at any rate, had never seen there before.

Colonel Wickham's face showed blank for a moment in his astonishment, then he frowned heavily.

"On what do you ground your congratulations, may I ask?" he said, shortly, sternly.

"On the fact of your engagement to Miss Fairfax." How the words seemed to stick in his throat! "I suppose by this time it is an accomplished fact?" answered Phil, staring his uncle full in the face.

The Colonel returned the stare with brows levelling more and more.

"What reason have you for supposing such a thing?" he asked.

"A very good reason," this with a short, untuneful laugh: "the young lady's own statement in the short letter she wrote to me, breaking off our engagement."

"Wha—at!" and now the Colonel's brows broke their level line, and arched instead. "Do you mean to tell me that Edie wrote to you breaking off your engagement?"

"I do. Why shouldn't she if she felt so disposed?"

"Without any previous communication from you?"

"Without any communication from me that would warrant her doing so. The only time I wrote to her it was to beg her to hasten, not retard our marriage."

"And in her letter to you my name was mentioned?"

"Oh, as good as mentioned," answered Phil with the same unpleasant laugh as before. "When a young lady tells you she infinitely prefers someone else to yourself, you naturally set your brains to work to find out who that other person is. I did so, at any rate, and could come to but one conclusion."

Hitherto the two men had been standing still staring at one another, but now, as Phil finished speaking, the Colonel suddenly turned his back on him, walked slowly across the room to a chair, sank into it, leaning back, looking white, and troubled, and old.

What a train of thought Phil was opening up with his hard, careless, mistaken speeches! What a temptation it was to receive those speeches as gospel truth, to believe that this young girl, with all her sweetness and youth about her, had really preferred him—the world-worn, weary old man—to this fine young fellow before him, had loved him all along through her awkwardness and coquetry, and at last her

honest, true heart had compelled her to make the admission to her young lover.

"There's nothing half so sweet in life as Love's young dream," save and except only Love's old one. Colonel Wickham, in the love-dream he was opening his heart to at that moment, seemed to see his old one embodied and given back to him. In Edie at that moment he seemed to see Edie's mother, stretching out her arms to him, and saying with one of her sweet bygone smiles:

"See! I cheated you out of your happiness once long ago; take it back now a thousand times sweeter than it was before!"

And yet—and yet! it was hard to understand. There were things that wanted explaining.

Phil did not interrupt his uncle's train of memories. He stretched his long limbs, walked across to the window, folded his arms on the ledge, and looked out. The other window of the room looked down on the busy street; this across a narrow roadway onto the river. Barges were passing along—a City steamboat with just half-a-dozen people on board. Among them a soldier in scarlet coat, and a girl. Very close together they sat, and the man seemed to be talking and bending low over the girl as though he were saying sweet things to her. Lovers, of course! What a couple of fools! And yet—and yet—heigho!—sometimes folly was better than wisdom!

Colonel Wickham found his voice at last.

"Do you mind showing me Edie's letter, Phil," he asked a little unsteadily, "if you have it at hand?"

Phil continued looking down at the river, and the soldier, and the girl.

"I should be delighted—only I haven't it at hand," he answered, without turning his head. "Don't know what I did with it—tossed it in the fire, I suppose, or perhaps I lighted my pipe with it."

"Can you tell me the exact words she made use of?"

"Sorry I can't. I've forgotten. They were short and plain enough, however, and conveyed clearly to my mind what they meant."

"It's a mystery," muttered the Colonel. "I don't see my way quite." It was said half to himself.

Phil took him up sharply.

"I see no mystery," he said. "Heaps of girls do it. Why shouldn't they make fools of old men as well as of young ones?"

Phil's tone was aggressive enough, but truth to tell, he was feeling very sore.

"She couldn't really have been in love with that other," the Colonel muttered again.

"What other?" demanded Phil, turning upon him furiously, a sudden jealousy leaping like a flame to his eye.

"Winterdowne. They were a good deal together of late."

"Winterdowne — bah!" And Phil turned upon his heel, and once more fixed his attention upon the barges and the river.

Whatever folly Edie might commit, she could not stoop to such folly as that. As well expect her to walk into the woods and fall in love with the first sapless fir-tree she came across as with such a dry, unsympathetic specimen of humanity as this middle-aged scientific peer.

Colonel Wickham's doubts, however, were not to be easily allayed.

"It's a mystery," he again repeated. "If I could but believe that she really cared for me, of course it would end the matter; but——"

"So far as I am concerned, you may consider the matter ended," said Phil nonchalantly, still with his back to his uncle and his eyes fixed on the river.

For a few moments there fell a silence between these two. Colonel Wickham began slowly walking up and down the room, then he stopped at Phil's side, laying a hand on his shoulder.

"Phil—Phil," he said, in a pained, vibrating tone, "choke down your pride; come home with me and win your old love back again! Take no refusal; make her give herself to you once more. Poor child! left to herself, she is bound to rush into misfortune and folly."

Phil turned a white, fierce face towards the Colonel.

"Is she a bale of goods," he cried passionately, "to be handed from nephew to uncle, from uncle to nephew? Thank you, no; I decline such a family arrangement. Take your good fortune, sir, and make much of it. All I ask of you is, not to ask me to come and be a spectator to it."

Then he walked away to his writing-table, seated himself, began opening and shutting drawers, took out a package of luggage-labels and began addressing them—the said labels were subsequently found to be illegible and were committed to the flames.

The Colonel recommenced his slow,

irregular walk up and down the room. His brain felt clouded and bewildered; it could not settle itself to any steady, linked train of thought, but went jerking and zigzagging in odd, inconsequential fashion, just as it listed. After a time, things must clear themselves to him, and he would be able to think calmly over the whole state of affairs. For the present he must give it up.

Then he suddenly became aware of the nature of Phil's occupation. He paused in his walk, looking over the young man's shoulder.

"Are you starting off again, Phil? Where to this time, and for how long?"

"Can't say for certain. New Zealand, Algiers, the Cape, perhaps. I'll let you know when I've made up my mind."

"When do you start?"

"To-night, perhaps, or to-morrow night, if you mean to stay and dine."

"No, I mean to get back by the sixteen express. But why are you in such a hurry to set off on your travels again? Can't you stay on a week or two longer in town?"

No answer from Phil, only scratch, scratch went the pen, faster than ever.

The Colonel made another turn up and down the room, and then stopped again at Phil's side.

"Let me have a settled address as soon as possible, where your letters can be sent," he said. "You young fellows, when you start on your travels, go harum-scarum here, there, everywhere, and don't give a thought to the old fellows at home, who like a line now and then to hear how you are getting on."

"Never fear, you shall hear from me right enough," answered Phil, still scratching away with his pen.

Another turn the Colonel made, and then again came back.

"And, Phil," he said, speaking in low, somewhat unsteady voice, "there's one thing more. Supposing things are as you say, and Edie really does care for me after all; you may be quite sure she'll be safe and happy in my keeping. Aye, as safe and happy as she would have been in yours?"

And Phil, recollecting the wild love-making mornings he had got through the last two days, lifted up a white face, in which his eyes glowed and gleamed with an unnatural light, and answered recklessly, madly:

"Safer and happier a thousand times over than in my keeping, not a doubt!"

SHILLINGBURY SKETCHES.

OUR LADY BOUNTIFUL.

To play the part of Lady Bountiful is by no means such an easy task as the world has been hitherto led to believe. Poets, painters, and romancers in general are chiefly responsible for the rendering of the character which has been foisted upon the public as genuine, and it is to be feared that these gentry have been no more veracious in this particular than with regard to "gentle spring," "rural delights," "the pleasures of contentment," and divers other now generally discredited abstractions. According to the counterfeit presentment of the above-named, Lady Bountiful drives about the blossoming country lanes and the shady village greens in a handsome pony phaeton, bringing out jellies, and beef-tea, and nourishing port, and hot-house fruit, and warm clothing, and even baby-linen now and then, as if she had a conjuror's apparatus concealed somewhere beneath the apron of the carriage. In her graver moments, she drops into the national school, to put the children through their catechism, or gives portions to model village maidens, when these latter mate with model village lads. She apprentices to the local carpenter, or blacksmith, or cobbler, the more soaring spirits of the village boyhood. Her voice is always cheery; she is decidedly "comfortable looking" in her outward seeming, and last, but by no means least, she has a pocket running over with small change, and an apparently inexhaustible balance at the local bank.

In Shillingbury we had a Lady Bountiful of our own; but she certainly was not fashioned on the lines of the recognised type, and in her method of proceeding, she differed still more widely from the Lady Bountiful of tradition. Mrs. Cutler Bridgman—for such was her name—was not properly speaking one of ourselves. She came from a distant county and was, as we were soon informed, the widow of the late Charles Cutler Bridgman, Esq., barrister-at-law. She herself was a Tompkins, one of the Wiltshire Tompkinses, and she had by her marriage with a mere professional man, caused an estrangement between herself and that haughty family, whose fortunes, as we afterwards learned, were first established by one John Tompkins, an army clothier of Farringdon Street, who flourished in the reign of George the

Second. Neither did she take kindly to her husband's family, who were London people; for she was possessed with the idea—a very natural and laudable one in a descendant of a citizen of London and a merchant tailor—that those people whose only hearthstone lay within the metropolitan limits, could not be exactly of the right sort; certainly not the right sort when judged by a county standard. So on account of the cheapness of house-rent, and of its sufficient remoteness, both from Tompkinses and Cutler Bridgmans, she fixed upon Shillingbury for her abode.

She hired a fine old-fashioned red-brick house, standing at the lower part of the market-place, just opposite the church gates, and there she brought her family, consisting of four awkward, long-limbed girls, whose ages ranged between eleven and sixteen. These were all her kith and kin; but the catalogue of the Cutler Bridgman household would be very incomplete without mention of Miss Eliza Pomfrey, a person who had come to Mrs. Bridgman as nurse to her first child, and now, having seen the whole troop through all the difficulties of childhood, spent her time in ruling the household, collectively and individually, with a rod of iron.

Eliza Pomfrey belonged to that class of old family servants over whose decay and disappearance so many laments are uttered; but I doubt whether we should hear so many regrets on the matter if everyone knew, at first hand, the full liability attached to the possession of an old family servant like Miss Pomfrey. She viewed mankind in general, and the tradesmen with whom she had dealings especially, with eyes of suspicion and scarcely veiled hostility. Putting aside a few trifling peculations, which by long usage had lost all flavour of wrongdoing, she was rigorously honest. Like the typical dragoman of the East, she was resolute in suffering no outsider to have any share in plundering her employer.

In bowing her neck to the yoke of a house-tyrant, Mrs. Cutler Bridgman was probably actuated by the same motives which now and then induce the French nation, when it grows a little weary of changes of ministry, popular demonstrations, and revolutionary antics in general, to put up for a time with the lesser discomforts of personal rule. It is convenient, no doubt, to have all your laws made for you, and all your household routine organised; all your military and naval affairs kept

straight, and all your tradesmen's bills paid without any trouble, beyond paying the necessary taxes, or signing the necessary cheques. The French nation is occasionally seized with a desire to be let alone to grow its grapes and beetroot, and count its eggs and artichokes; and in the same way Mrs. Cutler Bridgman felt herself impelled to delegate her household duties, and a certain portion of her personal liberty, to her executive power, in order to find time to prosecute the mission to which she believed she was called.

For Mrs. Cutler Bridgman, like Mrs. Jellyby, felt on the subject of missions very strongly indeed; but, unlike that lady, she did not survey the uttermost parts of the earth in search of her proselytes. She preferred to work in her own place amongst her own people, taking them vigorously in hand whether they wished to be reformed or not. No one, looking at our Lady Bountiful in the flesh, would have been surprised to discover that she was a person of energetic disposition. She was tall and thin in person, apparently fragile as a lath, but really endowed with well-nigh inexhaustible powers of endurance. Her face, never comely at its best, had been marked and furrowed by care; and, by losing its smoothness, had gained much in character and expression. Outdoors one always saw her attired in a long grey cloak, and wearing the plainest of bonnets. It was a rare occurrence, indeed, to traverse Shillingbury from one end to the other, without catching a glimpse of her sombre figure, either coming out of a cottage or diving down some alley in prosecution of the particular work on hand. She seemed to be perpetually on the move, and indeed no harder penance could have been placed upon her than to keep her inactive and unemployed for a whole day. Early in the morning she would write and dispatch half-a-dozen notes, making appointments with half-a-dozen different people at places perhaps seven miles apart, and she would very rarely be behind time, let the matter concerned be ever so trifling.

Following the line of religious thought she did, Mrs. Cutler Bridgman could hardly have looked forward to enjoying anything like spiritual peace in Shillingbury, supposing that she knew the state of church parties before she came amongst us. Mr. Northborough, our then rector, read with perfect decorum the morning and evening services every Sunday, and treated his

hearers on each occasion to one of those exquisitely polished, carefully reasoned, spoken essays which he called sermons. No man could be more free from enthusiasm than he was, and certainly no one would be more likely to regard with amused contempt the strivings and runnings to and fro of an active woman like Mrs. Cutler Bridgman in her universal crusade against human frailty. The Rev. Onesiphorus Tulke was at that time the head-master of the free-school; and, aided and abetted by Mr. Winsor, was in his full career of activity on behalf of the various evangelical societies favoured by the latter gentleman. A band of malcontents would make surreptitious visits on the great festivals of the Church and on saints' days to Bletherton, where Mr. Laporte, the new vicar, had started choral services, a surplised choir, and divers other innovations. Last, but not least, there was Miss Dalgairns, an Ishmaelite indeed, regarding the rector as a hidden rationalist if not infidel. Mr. Tulke—well! Mr. Tulke preached doctrines approximately sound, no doubt; but the sharp nose of Miss Dalgairns was not at fault with respect to the reverend gentleman's true character. She smelt the rat long before anyone else in Shillingbury had any suspicions about him. Naturally the wanderers over to Bletherton came in for her fiercest denunciations. In addition to all these parties in the church, there was a compact minority of Nonconformists, who loved their brethren of the establishment, high, low, and broad, as dearly as these last-named sections loved one another.

But, as a matter of fact, the Irishman who once complained that he was growing mouldy for want of a "bating," would not have been more uncomfortable in a region of complete calm than Mrs. Cutler Bridgman. Indeed, I have a suspicion that, before she came to Shillingbury, she sent an emissary to enquire whether there was to be found sufficient fuel to keep permanently at boiling-point the kettle of theological hot water, and that she must have found the report to be all that she could desire.

The church views favoured by our Lady Bountiful were undeniably high. For the age in which she lived they were very high indeed, and she soon found out that no one in Shillingbury came up to her standard, even amongst that small band of wanderers who strayed occasionally into the alien fold of Mr. Laporte at Bletherton.

But naturally she looked to find the most promising field for her proselytising activity amongst these, and it was not long before she set to work. When she, figuratively speaking, set up her standard in the midst of a hostile camp, she was not the only one who felt something of the "rapture of the strife." Miss Dalgairns, in the absence of any adversary worthy of her prowess, was beginning to find her arms growing rusty, and to sigh for some new occasion to use them. Mrs. Cutler Bridgman was not the woman to veil her crest, or to make any secret of her religious attitude, but even had she been given to concealment, she would hardly have baffled for a week the skilful espionage of her opponent. As it was, she threw down the gage of battle at once, and the declaration of war, I regret to say, was delivered in church.

The pew belonging to Miss Dalgairns was the next one to Mrs. Bridgman's. The former lady had a comfortable cushion and hassock in a particular corner, and invariably worshipped looking westward as religiously as an Indian Mussulman. When the Creed was repeated, on the first Sunday of Mrs. Bridgman's attendance at morning service, it was a fine sight to see the champions face each other. Not one of the nodding plumes of Miss Dalgairns's Sunday bonnet gave sign of motion, while Mrs. Bridgman, gazing eastward, surged and bowed, and elevated and prostrated herself with extra fervour at the appointed places. After this all Shillingbury knew that the signal for battle had been given, and that it would not be long to wait before the first blow would be struck.

Among the more favoured protégées of Miss Dalgairns in Shillingbury was an elderly dame named Lydia Crump. Mrs. Crump was a widow who lived on a small pension, given to her by her late husband's employers, and with her resided her grandson, Joshua, the only child of her only daughter, who had died when Joshua was a baby. Mrs. Crump was a feeble-voiced, querulous-tempered, pious old woman, and Joshua was one of those slow-witted, flabby-faced, listless boys, who appear to develop so readily under a grandmother's nurture. It is hardly necessary to say that, in order to stand as high as she did in Miss Dalgairns's books, Mrs. Crump had been forced to surrender her freedom both of will and deed to the direction of her imperious patroness. She ate and drank what Miss Dalgairns declared to be most wholesome, and at the same time

most economical. She read, or professed to read, the sheaves of tracts which were laid upon her table. She allowed herself to be physicked from the Dalgairns pharmacopoeia, and she would plead guilty to the possession of whatever ailment Miss Dalgairns might tax her with, even though that lady might affirm she was suffering from bronchitis, while she herself would only be sensible of rheumatism in her left leg. The effects of the Dalgairns domination, though in a minor degree, were felt by Master Joshua Bates from his earliest youth, and Joshua, though he was not a very bright boy, began with ripening years to regard the benefactress of the house with a feeling of undoubted awe, with which, it must be confessed, there was mingled more of abhorrence than of affection. Poor old Lydia was lonely, and unwilling to part with her grandson when he reached that age which usually sees boys of his class being bound apprentices or setting off into the world in quest of fortune. Ever since Joshua had been breeched, she had been tremblingly on the watch for that day when Miss Dalgairns should bear down upon her, and tell her that the boy must be sent out into the world to earn his bread by this or that calling; but for some reason or other "the dreadful dawn was stayed" till Joshua was nigh fifteen; a strange circumstance indeed, for Miss Dalgairns, in cases when acting for one person's good meant inflicting punishment upon another, was usually very prompt. But at last the thunderbolt fell. Lydia was told one morning that she must take Joshua to the tailor's to be measured for a page's suit, as a situation in that capacity had been secured for him in the household of the Hon. Mrs. Chespare.

When Joshua was made aware of the fortune which was in store for him, he did not display any particular joy. He wandered about the streets and roads all day looking the picture of misery. Perhaps he lamented the rapidly shortening span of his liberty, or perhaps he was turning over in his mind some of those stories which he had heard about the rigorous discipline of Mrs. Chespare's servants'-hall, and of the somewhat meagre diet provided therein. Anyhow, he was mopping up his tears as he shuffled along Church Lane, when suddenly he almost ran against our Lady Bountiful, who was coming round the corner in the opposite direction. Mrs. Bridgman had then been located in Shillingbury about a year, and during that

time she had pretty well mastered the state and circumstances of every household, and, amongst other details, she had attentively considered the relations subsisting between Miss Dalgairns and her dependents. Here was Joshua Bates in tears, something had evidently gone wrong, and her experience told Mrs. Bridgman that the occasion was one to be improved. So she stopped Joshua, and by half-a-dozen judiciously put questions, ascertained how the land lay. After listening to the boy's whimpering protestations that he should certainly be starved or die of cold if the plans on his behalf were carried out, she bade him cheer up and come to her house the next morning.

When Joshua told his grandmother what had befallen him, the poor old woman's heart sank within her; for, since Mrs. Cutler Bridgman had been amongst us, Miss Dalgairns had turned on a fresh and very pungent supply of anti-Puseyite tracts; and she had not omitted to supplement the printed warnings contained in these by divers verbal ones, caustic, and going straight to the point. Lydia felt that it would be a very bad quarter of an hour for her when she faced her patroness, and informed her that Joshua had been in parley with the enemy. She told Joshua, with a faint assumption of authority, that he had better keep clear of Mrs. Bridgman; but Joshua declared that he meant to go. The boy was not gifted with a very robust will, but the chance hope of an escape from his dreaded servitude in buttons now nerved him to persevere to the end.

At the appointed hour he slipped away, and on his return informed his astonished grand-parent that Mrs. Bridgman was a very nice lady. She didn't keep him waiting outside the scullery-door, as Miss Dalgairns did, but spoke to him in the housekeeper's-room, regaling him with a lump of cake and a glass of beer after the interview. She said, too, that anyone might see that he, Joshua, was not a boy fitted for indoor service, and finished by asking him whether his tastes ran in the direction of shoemaking. If they did she would bind him apprentice to Lambert Cuddon. He had always wished to be a shoemaker, and here was his chance. He would go to Miss Dalgairns on the morrow, and say that Mrs. Chespare must look out for another boy in buttons. But when, about ten minutes afterwards, Miss Dalgairns came in and said that the page's suit was ready, and that she would come

round to-morrow and see how it fitted, poor Joshua's spirit failed him, and he sat dumb and awe-stricken. But the next morning there came a note from Mrs. Chespare, saying she would not require Joshua Bates as a man-servant. How the question of that futile livery was settled I know not; but I will venture to say that if it ever was paid for, the payment did not come out of the Chespare coffers. It happened that just at this time Miss Dalgairns was called away from Shillingbury for about a fortnight, and when she returned she found Joshua Bates bound apprentice to Lambert Cuddon, as fast as indentures could bind him.

And then the outburst of her indignation was terrible. Lambert Cuddon was as obnoxious to her as any person could well be. He was indeed a decent fellow enough in his trade, neither a freethinker nor a democrat, as the sons of the last often are. He had a very good tenor voice, and formerly had been one of the leaders of the church choir, but his position in this he resigned, owing to a dispute with Jonas Harper, just at the time when Mr. Laporte and his doings at Bletherton began to attract notice in Shillingbury. He did some soleing and heeling to the well-patched shoes of the above-named divine, and one Sunday morning, thinking, perhaps, that one good turn deserved another, he walked over to Bletherton church. Mr. Laporte was a man of the world, and by a little judicious flattery he soon enlisted Cuddon as a member of his own choir.

Miss Dalgairns knew well enough that Joshua would learn something else besides nailing and sewing uppers in Lambert Cuddon's workshop. Poor Lydia took to her bed in consequence of the flood of reproaches which were launched at her head, and was only induced to "get about again" on account of the abundance and nauseousness of the medicines which she was commanded to swallow. Whenever Joshua met his quondam patroness he was greeted with a frown of the blackest disapprobation, which grew yet more dire when it was noised abroad that he had been seen walking with his master in the direction of Bletherton, and gave way to a stare of contemptuous non-recognition after it had been clearly established that he had walked in procession, carrying a banner, on the occasion of the last harvest thanksgiving service.

Mrs. Bridgman, by this move of hers—a move which she spoke of as the winning of

a soul to the Church—while other people called it kidnapping, pure and simple, certainly strengthened her position. She got Cuddon a lot of work for the Asylum for Decayed Anglican Organ-Blowers, an establishment connected with an "advanced" West End London church, and Joshua, after his apprenticeship was over, was transferred, by her influence, to a leading establishment in Martlebury. She was a shrewd woman of the world, and she had learnt that you win people over to your way of thinking in religious matters much more readily if you can show them some consequent material advantage in this life, than you will if you merely promise them joys which lie on the other side of the dark gate of the graveyard. When it became generally known that practical benefits might fall into the laps of those who stood well with her, a surprising revolution of public opinion took place. Matrons endowed with half-a-dozen children to be "got off," lost all their distaste of Mrs. Bridgman's genuflections in church, and became quite sceptical as to the truth of those stories about her worshipping idols and sending money to the Pope of Rome on the sly. The Shillingbury contingent attending Mr. Laporte's services waxed in numbers as time went on, and the gaps in our own congregation, never an overflowing one, became more apparent. The rector, Mr. Northborough, all the while treated Mrs. Bridgman with studious politeness, and even went so far as to express his high approval of her scheme for establishing a visiting and catechising mission at Brooksbank End; just what was to be expected of him, Miss Dalgairns affirmed, since it eased him of all necessity, according to his own code of duty, of doing any visiting or parochial work in that unsavoury district himself. By her successive benefactions at Christmas and Easter, Mr. Laporte's stock of ecclesiastical properties grew rapidly. When that gentleman was laid up with low fever she sent to London post-haste for a nurse from an Anglican sisterhood, and when Sister Monica appeared, one Sunday evening, with her somewhat startling head-gear, in Shillingbury church, Mr. Tulke, who happened to be the preacher, put aside the written discourse he had prepared, and thumped out a fierce denunciation of the scarlet woman who sits upon the seven hills.

Mrs. Bridgman's household, like that of most other philanthropists, was not, in

itself, a model of order, for Miss Pomfrey, with all her virtues, was not gifted with the faculty of administration. There was rough-and-ready plenty, as far as the table was concerned; and, with regard to the education of the girls, there was a rough-and-ready training at the hands of a German governess. They grew up mannerless, uncouth hoydens; not very enthusiastic as to their mother's work, but possessed with strong beliefs as to the purity of the Tompkins blood, and the inferiority of everybody else in Shillingbury. No doubt Mrs. Cutler Bridgman would have done better to spend more of her time in controlling her kitchen and schoolroom; but, had she done so, she must have left the outside masses a little more to their own devices; and our Lady Bountiful was fated to "missionise," for the reason which impels little dogs to bark and bite, if for no other. Granted, therefore, this necessity, she would have done better to work only with those cases of which she had positive knowledge, but, in an unlucky moment, she gave ear to the suggestion of the Rev. Cyprian Wicks, the priest of her favourite high-church in the metropolis, that she should take personal charge of a "case" of a somewhat unusual character, which had recently come under his notice.

The "case" in due time arrived in Shillingbury, and took up its residence in Mrs. Cutler Bridgman's household. In other words, the case was a very fine, handsome girl, who was evidently suffering from the effects of some accident, since she walked only on crutches. Miss Mary West—for such was her name—had been discovered in the accident-ward of a London hospital by the good Cyprian, who, when he ascertained what her religious views were, took a warm interest in her, and decided that she was altogether too good for the quarters in which he found her, and the result of his benevolent interference was that Miss Mary West became a temporary dweller under Mrs. Cutler Bridgman's roof.

Naturally, there were plenty of surmises as to the status and antecedents of Miss West. Mrs. Bridgman had already entertained several "cases" committed to her charge by the Rev. Cyprian Wicks, but none of them had been so interesting as the one in question. After the lapse of a few weeks, she seemed to be recovering from her lameness, for she was able to walk with a stick, and one Sunday morning she appeared in Shillingbury church.

Only once, though; for, as Mrs. Cutler Bridgman informed everyone she came across, Miss West's conscience was so outraged by the constant and flagrant violations of the rubric at every turn that she determined to go to church no more, till she might be sufficiently recovered to walk as far as Bletherton.

Meantime, she made herself very pleasant indeed to the daughters of the house. Anyone with knowledge of the world would have seen that she was not a lady; but the horizon of the Misses Bridgman was not an extended one. Judging from the way in which she talked of the metropolis and its delights, her experience of it must have been large and varied; but she never named either her calling or her place of abode. Whether or not Mrs. Bridgman was wiser than the rest of Shillingbury in this matter, nobody knows or ever will know. It was not from her mouth that enlightenment came to us.

Miss West, after a time, became an active teacher in the Brooksbank End mission-room, and was introduced by Mrs. Bridgman to a select working-party, at the meetings of which one lady read aloud Thomas à Kempis, or some such entertaining volume, while the others made various articles of infant clothing. At last the time came when she had quite recovered from her sprain, and began to talk of returning to London. The following Monday was fixed for her departure, notwithstanding the protestations of her young friends, and on the last Sunday evening they walked over to service at Bletherton church.

In a recent paper, mention was made of Sir Foxall Matlock, a nephew of Mr. Winsor. Sir Foxall was the eldest of a family of brothers amongst whom, according to rumour, Mr. Winsor's worldly wealth would be divided, and they were, with one exception, young men eminently worthy of their uncle's testamentary benevolence. This exception was Talbot, the youngest of the brood, more commonly known in the circles he frequented as "Tolly."

Mr. Talbot Matlock was a barrister, living, in spite of his early training, a good deal in that world "where soda-water flows freely in the morning, and where men call each other by their christian-names." Being such a one, it is not wonderful that his invitations to Skitfield should be few and far between, and

the reception accorded to him somewhat frigid. Indeed, it is doubtful whether he would ever have been bidden to his uncle's roof, had he not been a much more skilful shot than any of his brothers; and, on this account, more serviceable in filling the game-larder. The head-keeper would always place him at the warmest corners, even though Sir Foxall himself might be present, but then the baronet, besides being an indifferent shot, was fabled to be a little "near" in the matter of tipping.

Whenever Talbot was down at Skitfield, he made a point of heaping up still further the measure of his iniquities by going over to Bletherton to call upon Mr. Laporte, whom he had known at college; and it happened that he walked into church that very same Sunday evening when Miss West was present to listen to Mr. Laporte's voice for the last time. As the church was rather full he was ushered into the seat already occupied, in part, by Mrs. Bridgman and her following; and, not being much of a church-goer, Tolly soon lifted his eyes from his prayer-book to take stock of the congregation. When he caught sight of Miss West's countenance, he looked at her attentively till he caught her eye. Then the young lady blushed a little, and afterwards paid heed to nothing but her devotions. She was very silent as she walked home, but this, no doubt, was due to regret at her approaching departure.

Tolly was late for supper that night, having smoked a pipe with the vicar after service, and he was received with a chilling silence as he drew his chair up to the table; but he was not the sort of young man to be easily disconcerted. He chatted airily about Jack Laporte's new brette, and what a good fellow Jack was when you got him away from his preaching-shop—in spite of his aunt's deprecatory cough, and Mr. Winsor's frowns. "What a funny woman that Mrs. Bridgman seems to be, aunt," he went on; "she's always got a fresh young woman with her, whenever I come down. Where does she pick 'em up?"

"I know nothing about Mrs. Bridgman and her doings, Talbot," said Mrs. Winsor; "but I believe the person at present with her was sent to her by some Puseyite clergyman in London to be nursed for an injured knee. The young woman was quite lame when she came down; and Dr. Barnes, who attended her, told me she must have had a very severe fall;" and so

Mrs. Winsor went on at some length, showing great powers of insight, if she really knew nothing about Mrs. Bridgman and her doings, as she declared.

At last she was interrupted by Tolly, who gave a long whistle, and at the same time brought his hand down heavily on the table.

"By Jove! I have it now. Just fancy! What a lark!"

"What do you mean, Talbot?" said the head of the house.

"Why, she's Mdle. Fleurette, the girl who does the trapeze business at the Kensington Music Hall. You must have heard about her. A month ago she came down ever so many feet, and everyone thought she was killed."

Instantly, in spite of the horrifying nature of the topic, there was a rustle of curiosity round the table. There was game afoot; the scent was hot; and a successful hunt must lead to Mrs. Bridgman's utter discomfiture.

"And was she really sent from a respectable hospital? What was the name of the clergyman who took so remarkable an interest in her? Was it not almost certain that Mrs. Bridgman must have known whom she was taking in? Was the girl not one of the disreputable——" But here Tolly broke in.

"Disreputable! not a bit; a real good girl. She goes to church every Sunday. Jim Hennessy told me all about her. Jim used to go to the same church—a high church, somewhere Paddington way—just to have a look at her. Oh, there's nothing wrong about the girl, aunt. She's as right as——" But here a kick administered to Tolly's shins under the table by Sir Foxall warned him that there was no need for him to furnish a comparative to the rectitude of Mdle. Fleurette.

Miss Mary West had scarcely passed the confines of Shillingbury before the whole story was noised abroad, and the scandal for a time was certainly very great, especially amongst those mothers whose children had been taught the catechism by such a creature, and those ladies who had worked in the same room with her. How Mrs. Bridgman excused herself and the Rev. Cyprian Wicks, or whether she ever attempted to do so, does not now concern us. Six months after this untoward event, our Lady Bountiful left us to take possession of a house in Wiltshire which had been bequeathed to her by some collateral Tompkins.

THE OLD FRENCH THEATRE.

IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

EXCEPTING the Church as a matter of course, we do not know of any institution in France that has had a longer continuous existence than the theatre. Nominally, the French Academy is older. It was founded in 1635, and the *Comédie Française* was established in 1680. But in that year Corneille had ceased to write for the stage; Molière was dead; and all the plays that Racine had written for the public had been produced. The establishment of the *Comédie Française* was not a new foundation. This was an additional title, taken by the actors in the year 1680, probably because in that year the King ordered that the two existing French theatres should be merged into one, and that no other large French theatre should be allowed in Paris. It is difficult to say with certainty at what time the theatre first became national in France, though we think it more reasonable to take the year 1588 as a starting-point than the later date, 1680.

At the close of last year a book was published in London by Messrs. Chapman and Hall, *Annals of the French Stage*, by Mr. Frederick Hawkins, giving a somewhat detailed account of all the principal plays that were acted during the seventeenth century. The main body of the work treats of the plays acted in the seventeenth century, but in truth Mr. Hawkins goes back very much farther. He begins with the year 789, and takes us down to the death of Racine in 1699. That is a long space of time, and we think he has covered his ground very well. Keeping closely to the title of his book, Mr. Hawkins is an annalist rather than a historian, and of other stages besides the French he says little or nothing. The book is evidently the result of conscientious work. Mr. Hawkins has given us facts rather than his own theories about theatrical art. He has his own ideas, for he is in sympathy with his subject; but he does not egotistically show us that he wrote his two volumes as though he believed it to be of importance to the world that people should know what he thought. We wish, indeed, that Mr. Hawkins had told us a little more what he thought of some of the plays by the chief writers, or that he had said a little more of the nature of their work. We should be glad to know what Mr. Hawkins thought of these plays; for the

expression of an author's opinion, whether it be correct in detail or not, is often a true guide to the tone of his thoughts.

At the end of the second volume, Mr. Hawkins has given us a tolerably full index; and a chronology of the French stage, in which he puts under each successive year plays that were acted, and also denotes under each year all the most important events relating to the theatre. Both of these additions to the book are valuable to those who wish to study the subject. Of foot-notes, indicating the authorities, we have seen none. Mr. Hawkins may have thought that as these books and their writers would be unknown to most Englishmen, there was no need to give them. We believe we are correct in saying that those who do know where to turn to the best authorities for facts relating to the old French stage, will find Mr. Hawkins to be accurate in his statements.

We have said that Mr. Hawkins is an annalist rather than a historian, but in the first two chapters of his book, in sixty-seven pages, he has taken us over eight hundred and forty years, and has shown us the route pretty well by the way. After that time, important events come closer together, and years are more surely marked by plays of interest that have made their reputation.

The earliest French plays that we know much about are the Mystery Plays, and they belong to a civilisation anterior to ours. Mr. Hawkins says: "The Mysteries illustrated what to nine out of every ten men and women were the subjects of their most frequent and passing thoughts. It was an age of ardent, profound, unquestioning faith, mingled with debasing superstition." These plays were performed by a band of young artisans, known as *Les Confrères de la Passion*, and they enjoyed a monopoly for their performance. In 1398, the Parliament forbade them from playing at St. Maur, near Paris, and this prohibitory act is the first document we have which tells us of a definitely constituted company of players in France. For many years the representation of the mystery plays had been regarded by the actors and by the audience as a sacred show. Then by degrees the reverential feeling in the plays was lost. People who had paid their money for admission into the theatre wanted to be amused, and thus the whole spirit of the mysteries became changed. What had been looked upon as

a divine worship came to be considered a pastime. And this brought about a rupture with the Church. Until the excesses had grown too great, the priests encouraged these performances; they were so popular that the hour of vespers was advanced in order that all good people might attend the service after they had come out of the theatre. But when the mysteries had definitely broken with the Church, the plays became a question of profit and loss to the manager. To make them remunerative, the comic scenes were lengthened, the Devil became a personage of greater importance, and, discomfited as he always was on the stage before the audience, it was he who played the principal part. A new character, the Fool, was introduced, more unseemly than the Devil, because of his eccentricities, and then the wildest buffoonery was naturally the most relished. The clergy could not remain indifferent to these excesses, which, under a show of piety, were in fact compromising religion in the gravest way; and finally, when they could not succeed in repressing the burlesque, they got the representations prohibited by the Parliament. This was in 1548. The prohibition extended only to Paris and the neighbourhood, for we find these plays were acted in the provinces for some years afterwards. Sainte-Beuve says: "From a literary and dramatic point of view, that which essentially characterises the mystery plays is the lowest vulgarity, and trivialities of the most abject kind. The authors were troubled by only one care—to retrace in the men and things of former times the scenes of everyday life. All their skill was devoted to making this copy, or rather, this faithful facsimile."

Early in the fifteenth century another dramatic company of a different kind was started in Paris by the Clercs de la Basoche, a band of young lawyers, who played usually in the hall of the Palais de Justice. The Basochiens invented two kinds of plays—the *Moralité*, the figures in which are chiefly personifications of sentiments and abstract ideas; and the *Farce*, which was usually a ludicrous representation of any homely incident. In this, as in the grotesque part of the mysteries, we may see that the French comedy actors were in an informal way aiming at a representation of real life. Their love for reality was strong then as now, and crude as their performances were, the satirical banter was thoroughly appreciated. In a few years the *Enfants sans Souci*

followed with their *Soties*. These were buffooneries and horse-play of the wildest kind.

There were thus three troupes of actors in Paris more or less formally constituted, the two latter playing probably as much for their own amusement as for that of the spectators. The existence of the three troupes caused a rivalry, for the *Confrères de la Passion*, who enjoyed a monopoly for performing the mysteries, induced the *Enfants sans Souci* to play one of their drolleries after each of their own pieces. In 1548, after the pseudo-religious plays had been prohibited, the *Confrères* bought a portion of the ground belonging to the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and built for themselves a new theatre upon it. But they found that they could not sufficiently draw a paying public by their performance of secular plays, so they let their theatre to a company of actors who thought they understood their art better. This was in 1588, and for nearly a hundred years from that date, until the formation of the *Comédie Française*, the chief theatre in Paris bore the name of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. We think, therefore, that the French theatre can show a continuous line of existence from the year 1588 to the present day.

In the latter part of the sixteenth century an effort was made in France to revive the form of the old Greek tragedy. Ronsard was the first; then came Du Bellay, Jodelle, Belleau, Garnier, and others. They wrote tragedies in French, in which they strove to copy the Greek plays as closely as possible. The pieces showed an absolute want of invention in the plots and in the characters. The action was simple, as in the Greek plays, the personages were not numerous, the acts were short, and the chorus was made an important feature. The lyrical poetry was usually far superior to the dramatic. But except in ennobling the language, these plays can hardly be said to have any merit at all. They were performed in the colleges, and though the public might be admitted by paying their money, these performances could never have been popular. Their authors were young men who were scholars, and they were ambitious chiefly of showing off their learning to a well-selected audience. This attempt at a revival of the Greek form of tragedy is worth noticing because, as we shall see presently, the French dramatists thought they were doing right

in taking Aristotle as their teacher when they were writing their plays for the amusement of the people.

This outburst of learning on the stage was not likely to live long. The theatre tried to extend itself beyond the colleges; but the Parliament resolutely set its face against any reappearance of the mysteries, and the wild, rollicking farce went temporarily out of vogue. But with goodwill on the part of the audience, the theatre will thrive nearly always. At the end of the sixteenth century it was certainly popular in Paris. Mr. Hawkins says: "Nailed to posts in the streets, the announcements of the Hôtel de Bourgogne were quickly surrounded by a little knot of citizens, and the theatre was not unfrequently crowded to its utmost capacity. The curtain rose usually at two o'clock, an hour after the opening of the door." Tragedy hardly had a real existence until the days of Corneille; but the birth of comedy was earlier. At the time of which we are now speaking, the latter end of the sixteenth century, the two best authors were Larivey and Hardy. Larivey was of Italian extraction, and he put upon the French stage Italian plots, manners, and customs. He arranged Italian comedies to suit the French taste, as nowadays so many of our playwrights adapt French comedies for the English stage. Larivey's plays were all in prose, which was a novelty for a piece of any pretensions, and his dialogue was vivacious, and natural. He wrote twelve comedies, of which we still possess nine. Alexandre Hardy was a man of greater powers. He was nearly as prolific as Lope de Vega. He said himself that he wrote five hundred plays; another account credits him with six hundred; another with eight hundred. He was poor, and was obliged to write that he might live. He bound himself to the actors to give them six plays every month. Probably not all of these were written. It was common in those days for a troupe of actors to have "their author" attached to their company; and very likely much of the learning of the parts was from verbal instructions. The actors would learn what they had to say after the readiest fashion. Hardy's plays, and those of other authors of the time, were often transmitted to memory by the actors, and they were printed—such of them as attained to that honour—from any copy that an actor could write from memory of what he had learned. Authors'

profits were then unknown, but Hardy passes for the first playwright who exacted a honorarium for his work. His literary baggage consists now of forty-one plays—perhaps sufficient to prevent us wishing for more. Alexandre Hardy was one of the informal pioneers to dramatic literature in France. He had no good models to work upon, and his poverty pressed him so closely that he allowed himself no time for reflection as he did his work, but in his way he did understand the stage. The tastes of his audience were not severe, and he strove to please his public.

The Italian comedy was popular in Paris at this time, and it had a certain influence over the French stage. It was introduced into France by Catherine de' Medici, who, from her youth, dearly loved the frolics of the Zanni and of the Pantaleone. One of the old chroniclers tells us that in the reign of Henri the Third (1574-89), "there was an Italian company, who took four sous a head from all the French who wished to go and see them play; and that there was such a crowd and rush of people, that the four best preachers in Paris did not, among them, collect so many people." The Italian comedy was of two kinds—the written, and the improvised or popular comedy. This latter was called *La Commedia dell'Arte*, and was much the most highly esteemed. People were accustomed to it, and they liked it best. It appeared everywhere in Italy on the commonest stages. Each province created its own personage. To Bologna we owe the pedant, to Venice the merchant and the pantaloon, to Naples the "fourbe" or the cheat. When the set was completed, the parts were immutably fixed. Each player had his part definitely cut out for him, and the audience knew generally what might be expected from each actor. The success of a play would therefore be very largely dependent upon the merits of the actors, and upon their natural cleverness. Doubtless this constant repetition of the parts made the improvisation of the dialogue easier. But with the Italians gesture had a larger part in their play than spoken words. The best of the Italian companies that came to Paris were the *Gelosi*, who came for the first time in 1577, and after frequent goings and comings, returned finally to their own country in 1604. The pearl of this troupe, as she has been called, was Isabella Andreini, the wife of one of their most celebrated actors. She was very

popular on the stage, and was as much respected in her homely life. She died at Lyons, on her way to Italy, in 1604, and after her death the company of I Gelosi dispersed.

It would be more impossible for us now to determine how much Molière learnt from the Italian actors in Paris, than how much Raphael learnt from Perugino. But we may say that his early plays are as much Italian as French. The plots are Italian, and so are the modes of intrigue. So far as we can judge, it would seem that he was indebted to the Italian actors for the constant movement of his pieces, and he may also have learned from them that every line of dialogue should make a step forward in the action of the play. He is incontestably the most genuinely dramatic of all French writers, and we cannot but think that he owed much of his success to the Italians. The wish to learn, and the aptitudes were his own, but the Italian actors were his chief instructors. When he became popular enough to excite envy, his enemies reproached him that he had taken lessons from one Tiberio Fiorelli, who used to play the part of Scaramuccia. An amusing account of this is given in the third scene of the first act of a play called *Elomire Hypocondre*, by Le Boulanger de Chalussay. *Elomire*, it will be seen, is an anagram of Molière. Mr. Hawkins has made a mistake by calling this play "a ballad." Some of the lines relating events in Molière's early history are cleverly written, and they are accepted as an authority. Molière thought the play was scurrilous, and got it suppressed. In the last few years the piece has been twice reprinted. Opposite the title-page there is a picture representing the master and his pupil. The pupil has a glass in his hand, with which he is squinting frightfully—the glass being held so that he can see his own features in it, and observe his master at the same moment. The attitudes of the two men are exactly alike. Under the figure of the master is written, "Scaramouche enseignant;" under the pupil, "*Elomire étudiant*."

In the French drama of the first half of the seventeenth century we see also that Spanish influence was very large. It was from the Italian actors that the French borrowed chiefly, but also from the Spanish writers. As we all know, the English dramatists under Elizabeth and under the Stuart Kings borrowed their plots very largely from the Spaniards. But

we may remember that, though the Spanish dramatists were fertile in plots, incidents, and situations, they created few characters. A Hamlet would be beyond their power, and an Alceste would be foreign to their nature. Their poetry, or the pathos or passion thrown into their plays, never rises very high. Instead, they were strong in high ideas of chivalry and romance. Such feelings are more easily understood, and they became popular. The highest expression in France of Spanish ideas is seen in Corneille's *Cid*, played first in 1636. Corneille had then written eight comedies and one tragedy, but the greater glory obtained by the *Cid* eclipsed that of all the others. The groundwork of the play is wholly Spanish; but the beautiful poetry of many of the lines is wholly Corneille's. In those days Corneille lived at Rouen, and also at Rouen lived a M. de Chalon, formerly a secretary of Marie de' Medici. Corneille went to see him one day, and M. de Chalon said to him: "The kind of comedy that you have hitherto undertaken can only bring you a temporary credit. You will find in the Spanish dramatists some subjects which, if they are treated after our fashion, and by hands as competent as yours, would produce a great effect. You should learn their language. It is not difficult. I will teach you what I know of it, and until you can read by yourself I will translate for you some passages out of *Guiller de Castro*." Corneille profited by the advice, and rewarded his good-natured friend by writing the *Cid*.

We may as well say here that shortly after the marriage of Louis the Fourteenth with Maria Theresa of Spain, that queen caused to be brought over to Paris a company of Spanish actors. They came into France in 1660, and remained until 1673. They do not seem to have had any success except before the Court, and when they played before the town they failed altogether. An old author says of them: "They never could adapt themselves to the French taste; their drollery appeared grave, and their gravity ridiculous. The audience was woefully sober at seeing their comedies, and only went to their tragedies to laugh at them." Their language was not understood by the audience, and, unlike the Italian actors, who were so popular, they did not impress the French favourably by their powers of impersonation.

During the first half of the seventeenth

century there were two French theatres in Paris—the Hôtel de Bourgogne, of which we have spoken, and the Théâtre du Marais. This latter theatre was probably founded in 1600, but we do not hear much of it until the year 1629, when Corneille's first comedy, *Mélite*, was brought out there. The older established Hôtel de Bourgogne must, however, have been the better of the two, for when an actor of the Théâtre du Marais distinguished himself, an order from the King commanded him to leave that stage for the rival theatre. In the year 1634, five actors were taken from the Marais Theatre to the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

It seems pretty clear that the actor's position was more remunerative than that of the author writing for the stage. Hardy used to get three crowns (or eighteen francs of the then existing value of money) for each play; and later on an actress of the Hôtel de Bourgogne said: "M. Corneille has done us great harm. Formerly we bought our pieces for three crowns, which we used to earn in one night. Everyone was accustomed to the arrangement, and we used to make money. Now, M. Corneille's plays cost us a great deal, and we make very little." The author from whom we get this tells us also: "It is true that these old plays were wretched, but the actors were excellent and made them appear to be good on the stage." But the plays were improving, and the position of the dramatist would be improved when he could demand payment for his work. Of the three great names that enriched or made the French theatre in the seventeenth century, we must speak in another article. We have now only just mentioned Pierre Corneille, chronologically the first.

PRINCE FERENDIA'S PORTRAIT.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER III.

"So that's Ferendia—as you see him?" said Jack Morris meditatively, that afternoon, contemplating my morning's work.

"It is. How much more do you see in him?" I asked curiously.

"You've made him a pleasant, prosperous-looking fellow—genial, kindly, frank. Not over-bright, perhaps, but open as the day, airing all his small vanities and foibles with a childlike confidence."

"That's the man, as I am humbly striving to express him."

"Not the man who'd sell his friend or

his own soul for what they'd fetch, if money were short with him, or smile in your face and offer you a cigarette while he was telling you the lie that should bring you to ruin. Not Laurie Bosworth." Jack broke off short, and took an energetic turn or two up and down the room, then stopped again before my easel, and looked fixedly at the canvas. "Yet I'm drawn to him. Confound him! It's the old fascination. I feel as if it were given to me to know the secrets of that man's soul, and with my hatred there is mixed an infinite compassion and dread, and I feel as if I must hold out a hand to save him, though I can't, for the life of me, tell from what. Jervoise, over that man's face there lies the shadow of a doom."

Morris was given to holding forth melodramatically on occasion.

"All right. I'll paint it in if you'll show me how," I said.

But he took no notice of the suggestion.

All the same I was well content with my work, and got to it betimes in the clear, pure morning light. Before I had worked an hour there came a smart rap on my door, as with the head of a whip, and without further ceremony it opened to admit two visitors—the Princess and M. Nicolas. She was in her riding-habit, lovely as the day, even with black circles round her eyes and pale cheeks.

"I couldn't sleep for thinking of my picture," she said, "and had to turn out for a long ride to quiet my nerves. I was possessed with the idea that you would forget your appointment, and felt I must come to remind you. The carriage will be here for you presently."

The colour rushed to her cheeks as she spoke, and her musical laugh rang through the room. M. Nicolas merely bowed and smiled, and smiled and bowed, his moustache-ends curling up to his spectacles. Then he trotted off softly on the tips of his toes on a respectful little round of inspection. The Princess turned to my picture, and gave a cry of delight.

"Ah, it is himself! Come and see, Nicolas."

Nicolas advanced gingerly, and adding a pince-nez to his spectacles, gravely considered it.

"It is good," he pronounced at last; "but you have made him too English, too solid—stolid, reserved. You do not keep before you the Prince's character. You must make him—intangible? No; what is the word for what you cannot hold? You

grasp it, you lean on it—pouf! It has melted—gone.”

“So that is your view?” I asked, thinking of Jack Morris, and wondering that the Princess made no sign.

We found Ferendia in a state of comic disgust at my pertinacity, protesting that there was no such need of hurry, and that he should break no more engagements to oblige us.

“I only want to go over to Paris for a week, and then you have me safe back till the end of the season.”

“Safe till the end of the season!” echoed M. Nicolas. “We must have you safe before that, my Prince;” and Ferendia looked at him with much disdain at his interference.

The Princess came in presently, in a quiet morning-dress of velvet. The weather had changed, and a thin, cold, drizzling rain began to fall, augmenting the Prince's ill-humour, and setting her shivering. I watched the two with much interest that morning. I was curious to discover the terms on which they actually were. Were they real lovers, or sham? “L'un qui baise et l'autre qui tend la joue.” Which was which? The Prince certainly let himself be led by his beautiful wife with ostentatious subjection. He was enormously proud of her, too, and yet I caught a lowering glance of suspicion directed at her now and again, or his brows knit at some chance word of hers or M. Nicolas's, as if to discover a second meaning in them. She hovered round him as women do, making little excuses for a word, a look, a touch; and the look was devotion, and the touch a caress. She hung over me, watching with breathless delight my attempts to give the golden glint on his hair, or the sapphire lustre of his eyes, rejoicing in his beauty in an odd, half-cynical fashion—or so it struck me. Perhaps Jack Morris's dark sayings had given my thoughts a twist out of their rational groove. I seemed to read in the one handsome face vanity, instability, and treachery, as the features grew under my brush, and in the other hard, set determination, and a will as immovable as flint. Perhaps it was the day. It was so cold, and grey, and cheerless, that I sincerely rejoiced when the sitting was over.

“You freeze in here, is it not?” asked M. Nicolas, appearing as I put my things in order. “Ah, well, it shall be remedied. You make good progress.” So we all parted to meet again at dinner.

I thought Jack Morris had quite decided to ignore the invitation, when at the last minute he appeared to join me in the hansom. M. Nicolas, of course, we found there before us, and a nervous old lady—a Bosworth connection, come up from the country to chaperon two nieces, solid, dairy-fed beauties who sat in their fine gowns side by side, answering simultaneously when addressed, and keeping a wary eye on their astonishing relative, the Princess, like two barn-door hens on a falcon. She troubled herself very little about them or anyone else but Jack Morris, on whom she smiled her sweetest, and who took her in to dinner. Ferendia's greeting to his old friend was perfect, as also his attention to the Dowager Lady Bosworth. There was also to complete the party a stray curate, who looked infinitely perplexed by his surroundings, and a rising young authoress in a Worth toilette, who was kind enough to take notice of me. It was a singularly unremarkable entertainment, and came to its end in due course. We adjourned to the smoking-room after, where Ferendia and Jack Morris got up some animated talk about old times, to which M. Nicolas listened delightedly, and then went upstairs to the drawing-room just as the first of the evening's guests arrived.

Jack wanted to stay, to my surprise. He got into a corner, and kept M. Nicolas beside him telling him the names of everyone. There were sundry acquaintances of my own there, English chiefly, the smaller fry of diplomacy, though a big fish or two swam in later on. There was a large and miscellaneous assortment of foreigners, representing all nationalities with impartiality; with a few stragglers from other sets in society, who drifted together and looked about them curiously. I left early, as I had another engagement that evening. Getting home in the small hours, I found Jack sitting alone in the dark at the open studio window, an extinct pipe between his lips.

“What are you doing there, old man?” I enquired. “Moonstruck?”

“That's it. Or I wish I could think so,” he answered, turning his face away from me. “Jerry, my boy, how long do you mean to be about that job of yours?”

“I hardly know. I don't think the Prince means to give me many more sittings.”

“Get out of that house with all speed, I tell you. And if you find you owe me

any gratitude for the warning, never betray that I gave it. It's a magazine of infernal machines, and there's an explosion of some sort not far distant."

"What on earth are you talking about, Morris, and why need I go up in the general smash?" I asked incredulously. "And where does your private information come from?"

"Don't ask me. Take me at my word. No, I'll tell you this much. The last time I saw your Princess, she was amongst the Nihilist conspirators that I saw on trial at Odessa. She was a poor work-girl, the craftiest and busiest of them all. She had acted as a go-between, carried letters, distributed seditious pamphlets, concealed dangerous goods in her miserable garret. Imprisonment for the rest of her life was the sentence on this girl——"

"Doesn't look as if it had been carried out," I interrupted. "Why isn't she in prison now?"

"Listen. I happen to know that she never went there. Don't ask me how. Her trial was a sham, and so was her sentence. She was a spy of spies, a plotter amongst plotters, and she is at the same work here on a grander scale, I'll swear."

"And Ferendia?"

"I imagine he's a tool, and a useful one, with his good position in English and foreign society. If you ask how she comes to have met him and married him, and where the Ferendia estates lie, or who finds the money of which they seem so flush, or what they are all about here—I know no more than I do of the component parts of dynamite. I only know that when I suspect any to be about I keep uncommonly clear of it."

"The Prince does not look the stuff of which conspirators are made," I hazarded thoughtfully. "And his wife seems to be devoted to him," running over the improbabilities that struck me in Morris's story.

"The Prince has all the will if not the needful brains. Did not I tell you he lost his appointment abroad through selling Government secrets, and being fool enough to let himself be found out? The company he is in won't tolerate a mistake of that sort, and his wife won't save him. Love him? I dare say she does, as some women love. She'd take his kisses while she knew he had betrayed her to destruction, or she'd hold him tight in a caress till his enemies overtook him, one or the other."

"I hated him with the hate of hell;
But I loved his beauty passing well."

There you have it in another form. Only I say unto thee, Beware!"

"I shall have done with them to-morrow," I replied, and left him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE last sitting was at as late an hour as it could reasonably be—I forget for what reason. I was first in the studio, then in trotted M. Nicolas and drew my attention proudly to the brightly burning little stove, which had dried out the damp from the air and made the place comfortable. It was burning some sort of strongly-scented wood, a fancy of the Princess's, not oppressive even on that day of so-called summer, with the large window wide open above. M. Nicolas bid me a friendly adieu. He was going across to Ostend that night, and was very comic in his anticipations of the miseries in store for him. Then in came the Prince and Princess from some entertainment, gay and laughing over some small jest, the handsomest, happiest couple in England, any man but Jack Morris would have said. I began to feel myself ridiculous, as I thought over last night's confidences, and listened to the Prince's account of the way the day had been spent, and his delight in the admiration excited by his wife's toilette. I can't describe it, except as a shimmer of rose and blue, like a pigeon's neck. She never looked handsomer, he told her, for they were getting embarrassingly indifferent to my presence. She must dress early that evening, and get my views on her latest and loveliest gown. He was tolerably patient of the sitting to-day, for the weather was changing rapidly for the worse—cold and blustering with drifting showers that chilled the air, but hardly laid the pavement-dust. We had to close the window and stir up the stove, and the Princess sent for her zither, and sat down on the rough stage near her husband's feet, and sang song after song to us.

"Where did you learn that?" asked Ferendia suddenly. "That's a gipsy thing. I never knew you understood a word of Russian."

She laughed heartily.

"Not a word! I learned it like a parrot. I meant to astonish you. It's the same that I caught you humming one night, and you wouldn't tell me what it was." And she laughed more merrily than before.

The Prince's brow darkened, and he looked questioningly at her once or twice under his eyebrows.

I worked on as long as I could, but the light waned early.

"Is this the last sitting you can give me?"

"The very last," answered the Princess for him from the doorway.

"Why?" he demanded. "In the name of all that's mysterious——" And then broke off short to admire and criticise.

She had left us some time previously, and now reappeared in her ball-dress, looking as if she had come straight from the hands of Cinderella's fairy godmother; a veritable princess out of a fairy-tale—all pearls and diamonds, gleaming satin and cobweb lace.

"Do you not know what to-morrow is? My birthday; and I have promised myself to see that picture in its place to-night," she said, smiling full in his face. "I shall have it carried there at once. Ring, if you please, and then you ought to go and dress. We are to go to Lady Bosworth's early."

"Not I," he laughed. "You go and do your duty by the family, and if you like to come back for me after, I don't mind taking you to the Duchess's. What, not off yet, Nicolas?" as that gentleman appeared arrayed in one of those amazing coats that some foreigners patronise for travelling.

"Can I assist?" he asked in his little officious way.

So he and I together conveyed the picture to the room in which it was to hang, and, leaning it against the wall, stood discussing it for a few minutes. Then he discreetly retired while the Princess, with some gracious words, placed in my hands a cheque for three hundred pounds—a welcome sight in those years of scarcity. She offered to take me in her carriage as far as our ways laid together. She was to go with the two Miss Bosworths to the opera, and had to dine with them first. I went back to the studio to bid good-bye to Ferendia, whom I found crouching over the stove, declaring himself stiff with sitting, while the ever-obliging Nicolas, on his knees, blew the fire to a red-hot glow.

"Stay and have a cigar," he said; "I've just opened a fresh box. Take one."

I declined, and directly after the Princess, looking like the White Cat this time in her furs, came tripping up to hurry me. I shook hands with Ferendia, and she nodded gaily, then, moved by some impulse, rushed back to him, and taking his face between her hands kissed his forehead twice.

He stood up to his full height, out of her reach, half vexed, half laughing.

"What now, Hersilie? You are coming back to me? You will see me again."

"When I come back," and without another word she darted down the stairs, and was buried in the depths of the carriage, her hood over her face, when I joined her.

"Give me a match, Nicolas," the Prince had commanded in his usual imperious manner, and Nicolas obeyed promptly.

That was the last glimpse I had of them then. Prince Ferendia, standing erect and stately, his face illumined by the sputtering, flaming light which the other held, and Nicolas looking up at him with an amiable smile curving his grey moustache, and the light of the match twinkling back from his spectacles. He closed the door on me as I left the room, and the picture vanished.

That night an experience so singular happened to me, that I hardly know how to describe it. I woke about midnight with a sudden start, followed by a horrible choked feeling that made me struggle violently to raise myself and to try to tear something—I knew not what—from my face and throat, but I was powerless; my arms were held at the elbow by an invisible bond, and I was too stupefied to realise where I was or what was happening to me, except that I must die. I gasped and strove, but in a dull, dizzy fashion, and then at last the whole world seemed reeling with me, and I slid off the solid ground into a great sea of blackness and peace. Then, with a tingling shiver, I woke—myself again. I sprang up to find Jack Morris watching me.

"What were you shouting 'Help!' for like that?"

I told him.

"I have been dreaming, too. Come along!" was all he said, helping me to dress with all speed, and we both descended through the sleeping house and stepped out into the clear, wet, shining streets. Without another word between us, we made straight for the Ferendias' house. At no great distance from it, we had to cross one of the principal main thoroughfares, alive and busy even at that hour, so that the sight of a cab, stopping to pick up a gentleman, need not have attracted any special attention. It made me stop, however, and lay my hand on Morris's arm. He saw it too, and drew me back into the shadow of a building. The light from a gas-lamp shone full into the cab-window, and glanced for a second on the glasses of a pair of spectacles and the curl of a grey moustache.

"Not on board the Ostend boat!" I said. "Where has he been?"

Jack only responded by quickening his steps, and a few more brought us in front of the house. There were lights in some of the windows, and I was about to ring, when Morris stopped me, and gently tried the door. It opened readily, and we entered. The table was laid for supper in the dining-room, but there was no sign of anyone about. Without further question or hesitation we ran upstairs, straight to the studio. The key was outside the door, but it was not locked. Before I could turn it a breathless servant came rushing up after us.

"We have come to supper with the Prince," said Morris coolly; "hasn't he come in yet?"

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the man, recognising me. "I had only just stepped across the road with a letter to the post. I hadn't left the house a minute. The Prince has not come in yet, sir." Before he had half concluded his apology I had turned the handle and opened the door. The room was close and the air felt heavy, though the window was wide-open and the stove black. That was all I saw at first by the light that streamed in from the landing; the next moment the man clutched my arm with a jerk that nearly overset me. "The Prince!" he whispered, and we all stood still and looked at him. He sat in an easy attitude in the chair in which I had painted him, his elbow resting on the table. His head, leaning back and turned slightly upwards, was supported on his hand; the other hand drooped beside him, a half-smoked cigarette between two of the fingers. His eyes seemed to watch us oddly from under his half-closed eyelids—that was all; and yet I stepped forward, and with a shaking hand touched his cheek. It was warm, yet no breath or pulsation stirred his frame. I moved the candle before his face; still that fixed, glassy stare.

"Look there!" whispered Jack, pointing to a fleck of blood-stained froth on the heavy moustache. "Ring the bell! Rouse the house! And you," to the footman, "run for a doctor at once!"

While he ran out to the landing, we tried to change the position of the body, loosened the collar and tie, and chafed the stiffening fingers; but each effort only made it plainer that it was a hopeless task. The household gathered,

clamorous and bewildered, and a doctor appeared as by magic—then another, and another. "Too late!" the first had said, and none of the others disputed the sentence. We had laid him on the low stage that had been put up for the sittings, with a cushion under his handsome head, and the doctor had just risen from his last fruitless ministrations, when the crowd around the doorway stirred and parted, and the Princess in her floating laces and sparkling gems rushed forward, and flung herself upon the dead body.

"There'll be an inquest," I said uncomfortably as we walked home together that night. "Shall we have to appear? Suppose the circumstances are considered suspicious, it'll be an awkward position—eh, Jack?"

"There'll be no inquest, and the circumstances will not be considered in the least suspicious," he replied confidently. "Do you think they do not know better how to manage than that? Prince Ferendia will be found to have died decently and in order, you may rest assured. Why not? If I happen to know what had been burning in that stove not many hours ago, and if I guess what M. Nicolas's last errand to that house had been, do you think I am fool enough to say so? No one else can tell. You have been painting a man with the rope round his neck—I told you so. Now hold your tongue for the rest of your days, if you would be wise."

The event justified his predictions, and a week later we stood together beside a newly-filled grave in a quiet country churchyard, near the home of his family.

"Poor Laurie!" sighed Jack. "I thought they'd have given him a longer tether. The end was bound to come, and I dare say he well deserved it, but I couldn't help liking him."

"Hush!" I whispered. "The Princess!"

A black-shrouded and veiled figure drew near, and, passing us without a look, advanced to the grave, bearing a magnificent cross of white exotics. Then she laid it gently down, and cast herself beside it with a burst of passionate sobbing.

"She loved him!" I exclaimed in a tone of conviction as we softly retreated.

"Yes," assented Morris. "Not well enough to save him, but well enough to avenge him if ever she gets the chance. If Fate gives M. Nicolas into her hands, Heaven have mercy on his soul!"

THE EXTRA

SUMMER NUMBER

OF

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

CONTAINING THE AMOUNT OF THREE ORDINARY NUMBERS.

PRICE]

1834.

[SIXPENCE.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
THE TEMPLE OF EROS	1	TOLD IN FLANDERS	36
JABEZ GAUNT'S TESTAMENT	12	THE SAILING OF THE PSAMATHE	
LUCY GREY	19	THE OLD STORY OF NARISHAL CHASE	43
A HOLIDAY MYSTERY	30	THE CAPTAIN'S COXSWAIN	56
AN EASTER VACATION			63

THE TEMPLE OF EROS.

By B. DEMPSTER.

CHAPTER I.

"A MAN and a woman went up to the Temple of Eros to pay their vows. And as they went, hand-in-hand, the man looked round him and saw all the beautiful things that lay on either side of them; but the woman looked at nothing—save at him, and the gold and marble of the temple gleaming in the distance. So they reached it at last, and waited there for the god, for though the spirit of his presence always reigned in its courts, he himself was not always to be seen by mortal eyes.

"Then, as the time was long while they waited, the man beguiled it by thinking upon all the things he had seen on his way up, and his thoughts amused him; but the woman, who had seen nothing but him, wearied, and as she had only him to amuse her, she demanded all his thoughts and desires. But when she saw that he had given some to the other things, she was hurt—then angry; then, at last, broke out into jealous passion, driving him, with bitter words, from her side. Then she went away, and hid herself in the temple. So when Eros at last appeared to receive the offerings of vows and roses, he found her alone weeping, and to him she poured out her sorrows. The great god listened patiently, for true love is ever patient in its strength.

"'Foolish woman,' he said, 'not to know that your world is full of sights and sounds, and that she who listens for the music of love alone, can only hear it broken in upon by discords. Nay, the very roses you bring me as offerings—your best and your choicest—have thorns. In your world the man is the wiser.'

"'But in yours?' she asked wonderingly, raising her tear-wet face to his, for she was still crying.

"'In mine?' and her eyes fell at the glorious beauty of his presence, as he stood before her. 'In my world there are no discords, for it is love itself, and into it are gathered all things—duties, ambitions, knowledge, honour—and they become one—love. And it is but a shaft of light from that land, piercing the darkness of yours, that makes the beautiful thing you call love. Only a shadow cast by the glory of mine.'

"Then the woman veiled her eyes, and broke out into a cry of longing and awe.

"'Take me to that land, that I may look on love in its completeness, and my heart will ache no more.'

"'I cannot yet—for——'

Then there was a silence, and the man who had been speaking the allegory, in a low, soft voice, his eyes fixed dreamily upon the face of the old sundial, against which he leant, flushed faintly, as if half-ashamed of his fanciful speech.

"For its way lies through the gates of

death," another voice, that of the woman standing at the other side of the dial, finished for him.

She had been slowly pulling a rose to pieces as he spoke. After her first look of puzzled wonder at him, as he began the quaint allegory, she had never once raised her eyes from the rose, till he stopped as suddenly as he had begun. Then, still without looking, she ended the story for him.

There was a second's pause. The young man passed his hand carelessly over the face of the sundial, brushing off a leaf that had fallen on it. But the colour which had so suddenly come into his face had not died out, though it was so faint, and the woman's eyes were so full of shadows cast by her own thoughts, that she did not notice it.

Then she tossed all that remained of the rose out of her hand, and turned quickly upon him.

"Why did you tell me that story?" she asked, her eyes, with a curious bright light in them, looking keenly at him. "Was it my life that suggested it to you?"

He shifted his position slightly, letting his hand fall to his side.

"Was it, Douglas?" she asked again impatiently, as he did not answer.

"I can't say—it might have been, or perhaps it was a picture I saw once in the English Academy—a lot of people going up to the Temple of Eros." He spoke reflectively, gazing at the rose-trees before him. "I rather liked the picture. The legend was, 'Some have the roses, and some have the thorns.' I felt sorry for some of the poor beggars, you know."

"Those that had the thorns, for instance? But didn't you see that most of the people had them?" she answered with a short little laugh.

"Some had the roses," he repeated in the same slow, almost drawling manner; and he stepped across the narrow gravel-path separating them from the rose-trees, and gathered one of the roses.

She watched him with the same half-bitter, half-impatient smile.

"Take my advice," she said as he joined her again. "Don't go up to the Temple of Eros, or you too may find that there are more thorns than roses."

He was too much occupied pinning the rose in his coat to answer for a second.

Then he looked up and at her, his eyes as keen as her own.

"I am a man," he answered, his voice, clear and steady, quickened out of its usual drawl.

She made a little impatient movement of her head and shoulders.

"What did the woman do after the god had left her?" she asked abruptly, after a second's pause.

"I don't know," he answered as lazily as before. "History doesn't say. I should imagine—"

"Yes," with quick, bitter scorn, "I know what you would imagine—what all men would imagine—she went back to her husband, and was satisfied with the love he gave, and made up the blanks with dressing, and dancing, and amusing herself generally—she who loved him so perfectly, so dearly, that she counted all else well lost for his sake! You ought to be glad you are not a woman, Douglas."

"So I am, if I couldn't look about me a little, too. The god was right. In the nature of things, it can't be all love in this life while—men are men. It is too great a thing for them altogether, and they tire of trying to understand it."

She put up her hand to her eyes, as if the dazzling sunlight hurt her.

"Ah, but you would like to have some share in your husband's life—some part in his hopes, his ambitions, his works. If only Walter would let me be his wife—not a petted child, a mere plaything, to be treasured up because it is delicate and fragile! I don't want to be left alone for days, for weeks, for months, while his time is absorbed in work and ambitions in which he will give me no part, though I can understand and think too."

She had broken out into a passionate outcry, her fair face flushed, her eyes full of pain.

She had come a step nearer her cousin in her troubled excitement.

He looked down into the beautiful moved face.

"You ought not to have married a rising and ambitious man, Lettice," he said lightly, "if you are jealous of his ambitions."

"Jealous of his ambitions! Is it jealous to wish to share them? I cannot be contented with what he gives me, any more than the woman you spoke of. Surely, if her husband had taken the trouble to point out those things to her, she would have looked and understood. Oh, Douglas"—she laid her hand suddenly on his arm and looked up into his face, "do you

think I made a mistake when I married Walter; that——"

"No." He met steadily the gaze of her upturned eyes, smiling a little as he spoke, though his lips were paler than before, as if her emotion had stirred even his indolence. "No."

"No, no! I am sure that I did not. If only——"

Then her mood changed swiftly as the thought of the emptiness of her life came back to her.

Three years ago she had married the man she loved, looking forward to a life in which she should share his ambitions, his hopes, his disappointments, his sorrows; glorying in the thought of becoming to him what he was to her. She had married to find herself as completely shut out from his soul's life as if a granite wall had risen up between them.

He loved her, was tender and faithful to her; gratified, when in his power, her every fancy; but as to making her a sharer in the life of action and ambitions that he led outside their home-circle, he would as soon have thought of sharing his plans, his fears, his aims, with a petted child.

Strong, self-contained himself, love, as a power, had never made itself felt in Walter Drew's life. For two years Lettice had borne in silence the bitterness of her disappointment, the emptiness of the days she would so gladly have filled with her husband's hopes and toils.

But lately people had begun to notice a change in her—not for the better—and this afternoon she confirmed, to one of those who had suspected it, this falling off from the submissive patience which had first distinguished her married life.

It was this man who had suddenly broken out into the fanciful story of the Temple of Love.

"He is going away to-morrow for six months to look after his business and political interests in the West. You would have been amused, Douglas, if you had heard me pleading to go with him—for all the world like a newly-married wife. Even he laughed at me at last, and said I was a goose; that the long journeys would be uncomfortable; that there would be dangers as well as discomforts, for he would have to travel through rough, unsettled country; that I should be happier at home with my balls, and parties, and new dresses, while he may be shot, or sick to death, hundreds of miles away from my side."

Even the pale quiet of Douglas Montfort's

face was slightly moved by her mocking bitterness.

He looked down at her, a faint disapproval in his eyes.

"There, I have shocked even you, at last," she laughed in light mockery. "But it has been coming to this for a long time. I think the Lettice you used to know is dead. I shall build a monument over her, with the epitaph: 'She wanted life, and they gave her balls and parties.' By-the-bye, that reminds me, you will go to the Jarrolds' to-night? Walter is going to some meeting. I suppose it is very important, as it takes him away the last evening—when he leaves to-morrow for six months. I wanted to go and listen to him—you see he leaves to-morrow—but he says women are better at balls and parties, so I shall go to the Jarrolds'. You will dine with us as usual, and go on with me afterwards."

"But, Lettice!" There was decided disapproval now.

"You think I ought not to go after what you told me, but I am going. They amuse me, and Walter doesn't object."

"He doesn't know what sort of people they are."

"But, you see, he doesn't think it necessary to go and find out. I think it must be nearly three months since he went anywhere with me. One gets so tired of the usual run of people to be met with at ordinary houses. I want a new experience, and he leaves everything to my own discretion. After all, it is a freedom in married life for which I ought to be grateful. Now I am going in. We shall see you at dinner?"

With the same brilliant, mocking smile, that changed so completely in the eyes of the man looking at her, the sweet girl-face he had known almost all her life, she turned and went up the path.

He stood watching her, till the dainty white dress disappeared behind the hedge of roses.

Then he passed his hand slowly down the back of his head—a trick of his.

"Had she made a mistake? Queer that I should have had to answer that question. Queerer still that she should have asked it me," he murmured to himself with a slight smile, though his lips had grown strangely pale, for, as he stood leaning against the old sundial looking after her, a vision of what that question had meant to him rose up before him.

As long almost as he could remember,

Lettice had been to him the best part of his life. She had been the companion of his boyhood, as she had become the guiding star of his manhood, and while he toiled and waited, not speaking till he should have gained a home of his own to offer her, this other man, a stranger hitherto to her whole life, had stepped in and won her.

"Yes, it was very strange," he said, after another long pause, during which he did not stir; "odd things do happen in this life, but I hope nothing so curious will happen to me again. I don't think I could repeat that 'No.'"

It was some time before Montfort could leave the silence and quietness of the rose-garden, but when at last he did, and stepped out into the hot, dusty road beyond, leading back into the town, he was able to greet a passing acquaintance with the languor—almost affected—which was habitual to him.

CHAPTER II.

LETTICE DREW and Montfort were rather late arriving at Mrs. Jarrold's that evening. Her rooms were already crowded when they entered. Lettice, in a marvellous costume of Worth's, had scarcely ever looked more lovely and brilliant, and as she appeared, an almost involuntary murmur of admiration ran through the rooms.

Montfort noticed the sensation she excited, but instead of looking pleased, as the escort of the prettiest and best-dressed woman in the room, his eyes took a darker shade, and that shadow deepened as he glanced round at the faces of the guests. They all belonged to the fastest and most dashing set of New York. Lettice was soon surrounded by admirers, who gradually shut her out from Montfort. He lingered near a little while, looking on with intense disapproval as she laughed and talked, amusing the men, whom, as he knew, she, in her heart, despised. But he betrayed no outward sign of the pity and disappointment as he kept up a languid conversation with a lady near him. After a little, he strolled listlessly away, and took up his position near the doorway of a conservatory, draped with curtains. He felt so bored, and so generally irritated against the whole roomful of guests, that he was quite glad to find a position where he could escape notice.

He was suddenly aroused from his listless depression by hearing Lettice's name

mentioned by a man's voice at the other side of the curtain.

"Mrs. Drew! Yes, isn't she lovely? By far the prettiest woman in the room. No, her husband isn't here. In fact, he never goes anywhere with her. His time is too much taken up by his country to look after his wife," the speaker laughed as if amused. "He's going to be President one of these days, and in the meanwhile she goes about everywhere with an awfully good-looking fellow—a cousin, I believe, the most confounded, stuck-up jackanapes I ever met! If I were Drew, I would let my country alone, and take care of my own home. People are beginning to talk, and one or two women have hinted to me that their proprieties are being shocked."

"I don't wonder! She's much too pretty, and much too brilliant to be left alone. I say, introduce me, will you. I'm bored to death, and she looks as if she could amuse a fellow."

"All right, only look out for the good-looking cousin; he acts the part of guardian, and might object to his property being monopolised."

There was a low, well-bred laugh from the two men, the cool insolence of which sent the colour in a hot dark wave over Montfort's pale face, while his hand was clenched with such force that the nails of his fingers went into the palm.

It had come to this, then! He had feared that it might, but never suspected that society had already dared discuss her name. His first impulse was to confront the two men. They could not accuse him of listening, for though they had not seen him, they had spoken loudly enough for any of the guests near them to hear. No. It was a fact, these two men—two of the fastest and most objectionable of Mrs. Jarrold's set—felt themselves perfectly at liberty to discuss Lettice openly like this!

The next second told him the folly of doing as he first intended. He could not drag her name into a quarrel with men like these. Nay, he could not even prevent the introduction! The two men, as he still stood there, white with passion such as rarely moved his cool, collected nature, passed him, and went straight towards Lettice.

With an exclamation like a smothered groan, he acknowledged to himself the fact that he was powerless to help her. He had no right. He was neither husband nor brother. His very care of her would only bring her fresh insult. For had not

the men said it? It was horrible! Only one thing remained—to take her away as soon as possible from the pollution of the presence of such men as these. He made a quick step forward. But a hand was laid suddenly on his arm, and a lady stopped him.

"Ah, Mr. Montfort, you have never come near me to-night. How bored you look! I have been watching you for a long time. You are always an amusing study to me. You always seem to be trying to make your way through life with the least possible exertion, or outlay to yourself. I often wonder if you are utterly selfish, or utterly negative."

He murmured something in reply, feeling inwardly a savage anger against Mrs. Carter, though generally they were good friends. But the momentary pause had one good effect. It gave him time to recover the coolness he had so nearly lost.

"How well Mrs. Drew looks to-night! But what a pity it is that her husband leaves her so much alone. I hear he is going away to-morrow for six months, and she is to stay behind. It is such a mistake!"

"It would be, only it isn't the case!" He spoke with his most affected drawl, but a sudden, desperate resolve had seized him.

"What do you mean?" she asked rather sharply. "She isn't really going with him? Mrs. Jarrold has just told me."

"I am sorry for Mrs. Jarrold. It is always trying to find that your news isn't correct, when you have taken the trouble to spread it. Mrs. Drew is going with her husband."

Mrs. Carter gave a faint gasp of incredulous amazement. Had not the whole matter been discussed at every house of their set that afternoon? She gave a quick glance in Lettice's direction, and half turned. Montfort intercepted both look and movement. He adroitly, though carelessly, slipped in front of her.

"Good-night," he said languidly. "I am going over to Mrs. Drew. Shall I give her any message?"

Mrs. Carter, slightly piqued at being baffled, declined his offer; though, just as she turned to enter the conservatory, she stopped again, and looked up into his face.

"I am very glad, for her sake," she said meaningly. In spite of her fashionable follies Mrs. Carter was a kind-hearted woman, and Montfort knew it. But to-night he made no reply.

He made his way with unusual alacrity to Lettice. She must not contradict the report he had spread. If he could get her away, he would have time to think quietly over the plan that had suddenly flashed into his brain.

She had left the place where she had been sitting. In answer to his enquiries, some one told him that she had moved away with Mr. Wilson—the man who had asked for the introduction. She was on the balcony with him. Montfort went straight to it, though he wondered how she would take his request.

But someone else had made the path easy for him. As he stepped on to the long balcony he met her coming swiftly towards him, while at the farther end, in the shadow of the trailing creeper that covered it in, stood the figure of a man.

"Take me home, Douglas, at once!"

Her voice vibrated with the passion of some intense feeling, and as he glanced involuntarily down into her face, he saw that it was dyed scarlet, and her eyes were filled with unutterable shame and scorn.

She did not speak to him again till he placed her in the carriage, and followed her himself.

The brougham rolled off, while she sat rigid and white, every vestige of colour having faded from cheek and lips. Then, suddenly, with a low cry of unutterable loathing and shame, she tore off the glove from her left arm, rending it in the passion of her movement, and tossed it out of the window into the street.

"Oh, Douglas, why weren't you there to help me? Have I sunk so low as that! Do you know what that man did? He caught my hand and kissed it! Do you hear? Don't you despise me? And Walter— Oh, Douglas, I wish I could die!"

Her face fell on her hands, and she broke into a storm of sobs that shook her from head to foot, and he could do nothing but sit there and listen. It was bitter as death.

CHAPTER III.

ABOUT one o'clock next day, the tall, well-dressed figure of Montfort appeared, leisurely making its way down the street in which stood Walter Drew's office. He was, to all appearances, the languid, bored dandy so well-known in most of the best drawing-rooms in New York. Even in the press and excitement

of business he was never in a hurry. This morning, having left his own office ostensibly for lunch, he was more listless than ever. But instead of going to the place where he usually ate his luncheon, he had made his way to Walter Drew's office.

No one, seeing him strolling along the busy streets, would have suspected that he was coming on a mission—a mission that had kept him awake the greater part of the night, that had made him pace with restless steps up and down his room, while his face grew white and drawn with the conflict raging in his heart and brain. Perhaps if the vigil of the past night had been watched, people might have accounted for the fact that his eyes looked more than usually sleepy, and suspected that the intense stillness of his manner arose more from exhaustion than indolence.

In answer to his question, one of the clerks told him that Mr. Drew was in his private room. Montfort made his way to it, and entering, found Mr. Drew on the point of making a hasty lunch off some biscuits and wine, placed on a table strewn with papers.

"Glad to see you, Montfort," he said, rising and coming to meet him. "I was afraid I should have to be off without seeing you, after all, to-day. I've been hard at work all the morning, and haven't even time to go out and lunch decently. I did want to get home to Lettice, as it is the last day, but there is no getting away. There are so many things to look to, going away as I am for some time. Have something with me."

Montfort sat down, and Drew went over to the table and filled two glasses.

Montfort drank his, and then helped himself to another, declining anything to eat.

Then as Drew ate his biscuits and drank his wine, talking, in the quick, decided way habitual to him, of the journey he was about to undertake, the arrangements it involved, its political and business issues, Montfort leaned back in his chair, listening to him with a languid appearance of interest.

"Lettice is dreadfully cut up at my going," the bright, handsome eyes of Drew darkened a little; "but hard as it is to leave her, I can't take her with me. She is not at all strong, and——"

"Ah, that's really what I came about," and Montfort, with an apparent effort, roused himself enough to speak. "I think it would be better if you took her."

Drew stared at him in amazement—an amazement caused almost as much at the advice, as at the fact of Montfort, of all people, attempting to give it. Intimate as the two men were, as far as meeting and seeing each other almost daily was concerned, they were in reality as completely separated as two men, with not a thought in common, could be.

In his heart Drew rather despised Montfort, as a man who might make his mark, but preferred to fritter away his abilities in indolent frivolities.

"Take her with me! My dear Montfort!"

"I suppose there are drawbacks," answered the other slowly, inspecting, with much apparent interest, a wasp crawling up his wine-glass. "Still, there are drawbacks on the other side too."

"My dear fellow!" exclaimed Drew again, and he laughed; "it shows how little you know about women. Of course she wants to go now, but she would be bored to death in a week."

"She'll be more bored at home."

"Bored at home! How can she be, with such heaps of amusements going on! Just what women delight in. Then she will be going to the country, and she will have all her new dresses to think over. No easy thing with a woman, I assure you. And then you will be here, and you always amuse her. She looks upon you as a brother, and I can always trust you to look well after her."

The wasp had succeeded in perching itself on the rim of the glass, and just at this moment slipped with an astonished buzz into the glass itself. Montfort felt evidently for its bewildered, helpless condition, for he bent forward and gently tilted the glass to make a way for its escape. Then he answered:

"Yes, that is true; but you see brothers and sisters get tired of amusing each other sometimes. It grows monotonous. She might like a change."

"Really, Montfort, it is no use." Drew spoke a little irritably. Somehow Montfort's persistence vexed him. "The discomfort would be enormous. Besides, it is too late now. I must start to-day, and she has nothing ready. She——"

"She would be ready to start this same moment, if you told her." Montfort spoke with a sudden quickening of the voice, almost amounting to energy. "I say, Drew, take my advice, and let her go."

Walter Drew pushed back his chair, and

rising, took a hasty turn through the room. He suddenly stopped before Montfort, who had apparently relapsed into his usual condition, for he was leaning back in his chair, his eyes completely closed.

Drew looked down at him, something strange in his own keen, searching eyes.

Montfort opened his, and, languid and sleepy as they were, they did not once falter before the piercing, questioning gaze of the other man.

"Montfort! You have some reason for speaking like this. Nothing could have induced you to offer me advice upon my domestic affairs unless——"

"I thought you would probably imagine that I was impertinent." Montfort rose from his seat. He spoke calmly, though the keen eyes watching him saw that the pale quiet of his face was faintly flushed. "It certainly does sound a little odd, especially when your reasons are so good. I have no doubt that it will be an awful bore—the journey and all that sort of thing. Still, if a woman cares for her husband, she is generally up to a good deal, and——well, there are drawbacks, too, to a town—a town as civilised as New York, for instance, when a woman is young and beautiful, and there are all sorts of people hanging about. Fast men and women who are not too particular, and where every innocent and every good woman—like Lettice, for instance—knowing nothing of what's bad, might easily be pained or wounded. You see, there are some cases where this very innocence leads people into unpleasant situations. And Lettice is very young—a child in some things, and——well, you see, as I said before, brothers and sisters can't go on amusing each other for ever. Besides, I sha'n't be here all the summer."

He spoke in a meditative tone, not looking at Drew, but trying in his coat, as he stood before a little mirror on the wall, the effect of a flower which he had taken out of a vase on the table, Drew—who had a passion for them—always having some near him. It took a little time to arrange, for Montfort was fastidious. He even exchanged it for another, after fastening it in, putting the first one back in the vase. Still Drew did not speak.

He stood watching Montfort as he adorned himself like the merest fop of a fashionable drawing-room, but he did not really see him, and his face had grown dark and stern, and his keen eyes troubled.

Those carelessly spoken words had been a revelation to him, as that dandily-dressed man before him had meant them to be.

Dangers menaced Lettice—dangers and troubles infinitely worse than any she would have to brave in long railway-journeys across lonely country, in far-off Western cities, still rude, and rough, and uncivilised. Uncivilised! Yes, but what was civilisation when it meant dangers, and traps, and treacherous pitfalls, only all covered over with roses and sweet-scented grasses, tossed there by the hands of men to hide the hideous abyss gaping beneath them?

Lettice, his beautiful child-wife; Lettice, innocent and pure, given into his hands to guard, and honour, and preserve stainless—not from sin, she could not fail—but from the touch of the evil that goes on beneath the roses of fashionable, civilised life! As a man of the world he knew what that evil would be. A sudden great revulsion of feeling set in—a hatred and loathing against the society in which a short time before he had urged her to find amusement while he was away. Amusement! Would he have her forget for one single moment him and his love, in the foolish dissipations, the false excitements, of a society life?

"I had better go home at once and tell her to pack up." He spoke at last in his usual voice, though the quick ears listening detected the strain beneath the tones. But Montfort took no notice.

"Yes," he said indifferently. The flower was arranged so satisfactorily that he was able to turn from the mirror. Not another word was needed between them. Neither could have spoken it. They understood, and each knew that the other understood. Neither of them were men to speak easily of things that touched closely their hearts. Walter Drew knew that Montfort would never have spoken at all as he had done, had not some very powerful reason forced him to do so.

He almost despised him as a dandy, but he knew him to be a gentleman.

"I may as well say good-bye," Montfort said, holding out his hand, after having taken up his hat and cane. "I sha'n't see you probably when you return. I am going away from home."

"Going away! Why, I was looking on you as a made man. You had such confounded good luck getting that post. I suppose, though, you have heard of something better?"

To all outward appearances, they were both again the ordinary men of business.

"No, I've not, but I think I am tired of the place. I have thrown it up, anyway. I shall knock about a little, and probably I sha'n't be back in New York for some years. I think I'll try another country for a little—England, perhaps."

CHAPTER IV.

LETTICE was perfectly happy. She and her husband had been away from New York now for a month, and though the curious new tenderness which had shown itself in the first part of their travels had given place to his usual manner, she was with him, and that was quite enough.

How the wonderful thing had come about she did not know—only that he had returned from his office on that memorable day, and told her to pack up immediately, to be ready to start in a few hours.

That month had seemed a new honeymoon, thrown so closely as they were into each other's society. She forgot everything in it—even the rather startling news of Douglas throwing up his splendid appointment in one of the best business houses of New York, for no apparent reason save that of an indolent caprice. Drew forgot him too, as other matters, in the shape of his business and ambitions, pressed themselves upon him. He was glad he had brought his wife with him. It was a little inconvenient at times, for he could not rough it quite as much as if he had been alone, and necessary rest for her often retarded his journeys. Still, this was better than that she should be troubled or unhappy in New York.

In the course of their travels they had arrived at one of those cities of the West that, mushroom-like, seem to spring up in a night. A city still in a very primitive condition as to unfinished houses and roads, but boasting of one or two public buildings, and a grand new hotel, hastily run up, certainly, but fitted up with all the latest contrivances, though built rather too near the river, whose dark, turbid waters, swollen with the unusually heavy rains of the past year, washed the end of its garden. This stream, modest enough as to size and energy in its ordinary condition, had had some share in the unfinished nature of some of the streets, several of which, in the lower part of the town, had been under water during the past winter, while there had been constant

floods during the wet spring and early summer.

Walter Drew and Lettice had been three days in Newbery, and were putting up at the big hotel. Facing it was one of the unfinished streets. They were coming down it this afternoon. The citizens of Newbery were friends of Drew's, and he was returning from a meeting hastily held in his honour. Lettice had gone to meet him, and they were coming back together. One of the few houses habitable in the road was a large store, opened, in spite of many drawbacks, by one of the enterprising citizens of Newbery. A man was just coming out of it as Drew and Lettice passed, she listening with amused interest to a light sketch he was giving her of the afternoon's proceedings—a habit he had fallen into since they left New York. He had begun it first, thinking that, as her usual interests and occupations were taken from her, she might find the time hang heavily in strange places, where she had no friends of her own to speak to, and was gradually, though unconsciously, finding a real pleasure and help in her quick intelligence and ready sympathy; her shrewd insight into people and things, which had astonished him at first, so little had he suspected their presence. They were both too much interested in the subject of their conversation to notice the man in the store. Besides, Douglas Montfort would have been the last person they would have expected to meet in that out-of-the-way, half-civilised town. He had only arrived an hour before, and was as startled at seeing them, as they would have been at discovering him. He drew back till they were well past, then he went to the entrance and looked after them.

"Fate has some spite against me certainly," he said to himself with a slight smile. "To think that, after having made such praiseworthy efforts to put miles between us, she should have led me straight across their paths. They did not see me—that is a good thing. I must go away at once—yes, decidedly I must. Something has come over me; it is humiliating, but I am not as strong as I used to be. I think that last season in New York, seeing her so restless and unhappy, finished me off. It was difficult to see that empty place in her life and not try to fill it up!" The faint smile had died away, and he drew in a long breath, like a man tired out by some great strain.

From where he stood, he could see

clearly the hotel-entrance. The two had stopped before it, and Walter Drew was buying of a woman standing there a great bunch of roses. He put them into Lettice's hand, and she looked up into his face, laughing. Then, with a little gesture of infinite love and pride, she laid her hand on his arm, and they went up the steps together.

The man watching them with a curious, bitter-sweet smile in his eyes, waited till they were lost to sight.

"It is a curious sort of thing that a mushroom hotel, all gilt and tinsel, should remind me of the Temple of Eros," he said to himself, as he turned again into the street. "But it does. It was the roses, perhaps. 'Some have the roses, and some—'"

He did not follow out the train of thought. Perhaps he could not. He made his way to the office, from which started a coach that left the town every evening. He found that he had three hours to wait. It troubled him a good deal. But there was nothing to be done. He wandered about, and finding a place where he could dine, he went in and ordered dinner. He ate it, and so managed to get rid of some of the time. Then he went into the billiard-room and had a game with the marker. He lost—for he was not in playing form that evening—but he did not mind, for it helped to while away still more of the time. At last he could start for the coach. As he stepped into the street again he was astonished to find it full of excited, perturbed people, while down the middle of the street ran a rushing stream of red, muddy water.

"What's up?" asked Montfort, stopping and looking at the water, which seemed to widen and spread across the street.

"The water's rising again. We'll have a worse flood than usual, I'm thinking," answered the man he had addressed. "It will be bad for the hotel; that's my opinion. It ought never to have been built there. I believe it is undermined as it is. There have been some ugly cracks in the walls lately, only they have patched them up. But one wing has been settling. I told Webber so, but—"

The sentence was never finished.

There suddenly broke on the ears of the people, now hurrying through the threatened street, a curious crackling noise; then a terrific crashing sound, and the earth beneath their feet vibrated and shuddered as if an earthquake had shaken it, while

the air was suddenly darkened by clouds of dust and mortar.

"The hotel! The hotel!"

A simultaneous cry rose from a hundred excited, frightened voices, and a rush of men took place towards the street in which it stood, while terrified women ran out of their houses, expecting the same fate to befall their own homes.

Montfort was one of the first men on the spot.

One wing of what before had been a gorgeous hotel, was a mass of ruins, with only a fractured wall here and there standing, while the rest of the building looked as if in another few minutes it would share the same fate, if the waters, now breaking with lapping, gurgling sounds against the back walls, rose any higher. The fall of the other wing was the result of previous floods, as the tide which had now swept up over the garden had had scarcely time to touch it. But Montfort saw little of the ruins. The excited words of the proprietor, standing outside among the panic-stricken visitors and servants, to the effect that some of the people occupying that part of the building had not succeeded in making their escape, so little time had there been to warn them, drove every other thought from his mind. Beneath that hideous shroud of twisted girders and fallen masonry lay, perhaps, Lettice, with her roses!

He looked round. Neither she nor Drew was among the saved, many of whom were now hurrying off to be out of the way of the approaching waters.

Heedless of cries for his safety, and warnings that the rest might fall at any moment, he dashed forward into the ruins. He was conscious of nothing—the excited people in the street beyond, rapidly discussing a plan of rescue—the tottering walls and still falling masonry, that struck and bruised him as he passed.

How he escaped with his life was a marvel.

But, guided by a voice, faint and suffocated, calling for help, that seemed to come from the very centre of one enormous heap of ruins, he—stumbling, falling, forcing his way through narrow gaps, bruised and half-blinded—he went to the rescue of Lettice with her roses.

How he managed to make a small opening in their prison—for it was Walter Drew and Lettice who were there—he did not know. But he succeeded enough to let in some air to the prisoners beneath.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Drew as the light and air fell once more upon them. "She would have been suffocated in another moment."

Then, as he caught a glimpse through the opening, at which Montfort was still tearing with wounded, eager hands, an exclamation broke from him:

"Montfort!"

"Never mind," said the other, his voice sharp with impatience. "There isn't a moment to lose. Try and get out of this. The men are coming."

He did not say that the water, which had only wet his feet as he entered, was now over his ankles, and, where dammed up by huge masses of the falling masonry, was deepening into miniature torrents rushing along the sides of the tottering walls. The flood was rising rapidly. The ruins would not stand much more.

They would not stand any more. The words were scarcely out of his mouth when there was another terrible crash, drowning the cries and shouts of the terrified crowd outside as they rushed backwards out of the way of the falling masonry.

There was a moment of intense darkness and stillness. Then Montfort, lying on the ground, unable to move for a beam resting upon his arm, half-stunned, bruised, and bleeding, heard a voice.

He was a prisoner with Drew and Lettice. The new fall had not only broken up the old prison, but formed another, in which Montfort, as well as the other two, was now imprisoned.

It was Lettice who spoke.

"Thank God, Walter, you are alive!"

Montfort turned his head in the direction of the voice.

They seemed to be in a low narrow cell. It was quite dark, save from where a ray of light piercing a tiny opening fell on the farther end, which sloped downwards from where he lay.

By its light he could see Lettice kneeling by the side of her husband.

"Yes." He raised himself a little. "And Douglas?"

"Oh, I had forgotten! I could only think first of you. Dear Douglas!"

"I'm all right," he answered lightly, the darkness hiding the momentary spasm that crossed his face at the pained avowal of her own forgetfulness. Yet it only showed him a little more plainly what he had known all along—that he might have been the veriest stranger in the land when her husband was concerned. "No, don't

stir!" as they made a movement in his direction, and only struck down some more loose rubbish. "I'm a prisoner here for the moment; but it will be all right. They are coming to rescue us, and I think I hear them now."

His steady voice deceived them, and the thought of deliverance coming reassured Drew, who only thought of Lettice.

The two men shouted as loudly as they could, and, after a little, an answering shout from the rescuing-party told them that they were discovered.

Then there was nothing to do but wait.

Lettice lay still in her husband's arms, her head on his breast.

Montfort, from where he lay, could just see them. The beam across his arm was causing him almost intolerable pain, and he began to fear that his strength would not be able to bear it. Perhaps if Drew moved cautiously, he might come to him and try to lift it away. He called to him.

But he was speaking to Lettice of the good chance there was for their rescue, and did not hear Montfort's voice, which had grown low and faint.

With a pathetic patience, Montfort tried to remove it himself. Then he made a discovery. Their prison walls, so adamantine as far as they were concerned, were yet so lightly thrown together, that the beam resting across him, with its weight of timber and masonry, was the keystone to the whole. Its removal would turn the prison into a tomb. Even the slight push he had given it, brought down more bricks. He must have fainted then for a moment or two, for he heard neither the voices of Drew and Lettice, nor the sound of the rescuing-party overhead.

He returned to consciousness, with a sense as of cool fingers touching his forehead. Perhaps it was this touch that revived him. His head had fallen back on the ground, and there was a strange lapping sound like whispering voices among the bricks and rubbish round him. It seemed as if the voices had told him a secret. With a smothered exclamation he raised himself as well as he could, to find that the others, too, had learned the secret of the voices. The water was still rising, and was forcing its way into their prison, and apparently not finding an outlet below, was rising with the curious lapping sound up the sides of their prison walls to search for one above.

Overhead the rescuing-party had learned

it too, for they were working with fierce, feverish energy.

Montfort turned to the other two to see how they bore the secret of the waters.

Drew was holding Lettice closer to him.

"Lettice! If only I had not let you come with me!"

The words broke from him in the uncontrollable passion of despairing love.

"My husband! Think! If I had been in New York, and you were now alone, and then the news had come to me, and I knew that you had gone from me without one kiss—one word!"

"But, my darling, this may mean death."

"Death! Does love fear death? Does it not go victorious through its very gates as I shall go now with you?"

She put her arms round his neck and kissed him, and there was silence, save for the sound of the rising waters, save for the sounds of the eager efforts of the workers above, while husband and wife sat clasped in each other's arms, and the other man lay there, still, listening, having drunk the cup of bitterness to its very dregs. But Walter Drew, as he sat there, looking death in the face, understood at last what love was. Love, as Lettice told him, was the last thing on this side of eternity, as it would be the first to meet them on the other, for it alone might accompany them thither. At this supreme moment, when his ambitions, his successes, his worldly advantages, had all been swept out of his reach, leaving only love in his hands, he felt as he sat there, his wife's lips breathing close to his, her faithful heart beating against his own, that he had missed something in his past life which this moment of supreme agony held.

They lost count of the minutes as they went by. The waters, now surging and beating against the mass of masonry outside, could only force their way in slowly, but they rose surely.

Montfort's position on the higher ground gave him an advantage, without which his helpless condition would have soon placed him level with the waters. The brave workers outside never ceased, though every moment added to their own peril as the waters deepened round them. Suddenly a great shout broke from them, and at the same moment part of the rubbish overhead fell in. Drew had not time to draw Lettice away, and something struck her, and she fainted. But as the cloud of dust and mortar cleared away, Montfort and

Drew saw the opening that had been made overhead, just wide enough for a man to force his way through it.

"For Heaven's sake be quick!" shouted a dozen voices. The waters will overflow in a minute. They are all round us now."

Drew caught Lettice in his arms, standing up beneath the opening.

"Make haste, Montfort!" he called out in his eager excitement, forgetting what Montfort had told him.

"I can't move!" Montfort answered quietly. "I'm pinned down!"

Eager impatient voices shouted from above as the water began now to rush in more rapidly. But for a second Drew stood still, looking towards Montfort, his face, flushed a moment before, pale now with a strange look. In the light from the opening he could see at last how Montfort was held helpless.

"I can't leave you like that!" he exclaimed, his voice harsh and sharp. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because it would bring the whole place down on her. For Heaven's sake don't stand staring there! Get her out! Don't you see there isn't a second to lose?"

There was a sound like a sob in Drew's throat. Truly he had been learning great lessons in love, for he understood.

This dandy—this man he had almost despised—must be left to fill up the measure of his self-sacrifice.

"I'll save you if a man can!" he said as he turned away to rescue Lettice.

But there was no answer, for Douglas knew that it was useless.

He heard the sounds of cheering, followed as quickly by a shout of fear and warning; then a strange surging noise, like the voice of many waters let loose outside his prison.

"And some have the thorns," he murmured. "Well, if others have the roses, it is—right!"

Then the murmuring voices grew closer, whispering into his ears, while the water, like the touch of some cool, soft woman's hand, laved his weary head, and a faint smile parted his lips as he entered into another country—which was that of love.

So when the earthly hands of his rescuers reached him at last, they found that he had already been lifted up into the Everlasting arms, with such infinite tenderness and love, that he was still smiling.

JABEZ GAUNT'S TESTAMENT.

By E. RENTOUL ESLER.

CHAPTER I.

OLD Jabez Gaunt lay dying.

The news had passed from the hill-farm down into the valley as fast as it could be borne from lip to lip, and it was discussed there by women leaning over cottage half-doors, by men resting from the labours of the harvest-field, by lads and lasses who could snatch a moment from the toils of the broiling afternoon to gossip and surmise.

People had not loved old Jabez Gaunt—how could they? a silent, lonely, unsympathetic man, who held the neighbours aloof, and neither asked a service nor rendered one; a man who had always lived austere, grinding himself and all who served him down to the narrowest margin of possible existence.

But still, dying! That one fact altered everything, brought his brotherhood home to them, lifted him out of his commonplace surroundings and into their interest and affection.

Now that he lay there, powerless to repel their overtures or defend himself, they said the best of him: that if hard he was honest; that no one in the world had suffered tangible wrong at his hands; that throughout his life he had defrauded no man, had never taken advantage of a neighbour's extremity to under-buy him.

A hard man surely, but as merciless to himself as others, asking no assistance when the whirlwind ruined his harvest, uttering no complaint when the pest slew his cattle.

Uncomplaining endurance appeals to human nature as nothing else does. Since old Jabez had never asked for pity, there were those who said the best of him: what a good son and brother he had been, how patient and industrious, how neighbourly, too, till he met Jessie Dean, and she spoiled life for him.

Old Jabez with a love-story! The young people could not realise that, it was too odd and unnatural in their judgment; but they drew nearer to him because of the suggestion, and strove to peer at him through the half-open door, as he lay motionless in the old four-post bed, with the face that was like a quaint wood-carving outlined on the hard pillow, and the breath fluttering on his colourless lips.

There was nothing repulsive in death as it neared old Jabez Gaunt. Sickness had not wasted him, because there had never been anything to waste. Living like an anchorite, and toiling like a slave, even disease had not known where he was vulnerable, till death stepped in and solved the difficulty. He had been labouring that day in the harvest-field with the best of them. Towards noon the stroke of sudden paralysis smote him; it was not yet evening, and he was dying.

Jabez Gaunt had not been old Jabez always, though a moment's reflection was needed to bring that thought home to the neighbours. As to the few who had known him once, a well-grown, active man, strong as a lion and tough as hickory, with a certain kind of homely handsomeness characterising his sunburnt features; why, those people suffered from a form of mental confusion that made them aware of two Jabez Gaunts, and kept them wondering where the one ended and the other began.

It was odd, now that the solitary old man at the hill-farm lay dying, to think of a time when Hiram Gaunt and his wife and sons had lived in comfortable abundance under the same roof. Of course that was in the memory of the oldest inhabitants only, but still to recall it even as tradition was odd. The wife had been in her grave for half a century, and Jacob, the favourite son, had turned out amiss, as favourite sons do sometimes, and old Hiram had sunk into his dotage a score of years before, and afterwards out of life; and Jabez was dying silently as he had lived, and there was no one left but Janet, the child who had come there unaccountably, and remained unaccounted for, long after surmise and question were over.

Of course people said she was Jacob's child, but, being Jacob's child, would Jabez have kept her? And where was her mother? And what did it all mean? The gossips had fretted against the hill-farm mystery, but without approaching nearer to its solution. Among the solitary rocks and upward-looking tufts of firs, Jabez had learned the secret of keeping his own counsel.

As to Jacob, through years his name died out of the circle of the hills. He had been bold, and bad, and handsome, and more than one escapade had drawn eyes of censure on the Gaunt household before that last worst freak which led him to enlist in the service of his country and his king.

"And good enough for him," the neighbours said, in whose eyes military service and barrack-life had assumed no heroic proportions.

But years passed, and the shame which had swept Jacob Gaunt beyond their ken was forgotten. Troubles at the hill-farm ended, and things fell back into their easy ways, and Jabez had grown to be a man whose word was as good as his bond; a man who made few friends, and lived his own life and was respected. As to Hiram, he had grown feeble now, and past work, just observant enough to notice fretfully that prices were lower and harvests worse than in his young days, and to wish impatiently, now and then, that there was a woman in the house who knew more than old Martha, and could be trusted to think.

Jabez heard his father, and smiled his slow, wise smile. If only some things had been different he would have brought a woman to the hill-farm ere this. There was little Jessie Dean down at the mill; Jessie, who had the brightest, darkest eyes, and the roundest, pinkest cheeks, and the gayest, sweetest laugh. Oh, it was a long time since solemn Jabez had noticed Jessie Dean, and if only fewer years than half-a-score had yawned between them, he would have tried his luck like other men. But she was far too young, and dainty, and pretty for him.

There was no vanity in Jabez, nothing of that which in other men passes for a just self-esteem. He knew he was but a rough farmer, silent, and grim, and taciturn, grown mature prematurely, as men do who have had a joyless youth. It took him a long time to realise that Jessie liked him, went out of her way persistently to make friends with him, and cut the foremost of his rivals for his sake; but when he did realise it, then the great, silent yeoman brought all he was and hoped to be, and laid it at her feet.

And Jessie had kissed him, of her own accord; she was proud of her conquest, proud to be wooed by Jabez Gaunt.

He had gone home that night exultant; she loved him—the girl who was fit for a prince. Never had the way up the hill seemed so short as beneath his fevered strides; never had the landrails cried as musically in the springing corn; never had the lights in the valley offered him such a greeting of friendship and good fellowship.

The mastiff fawned on him as he crossed the paved yard; his father's voice greeted him as he opened the door:

"Jabez—is it Jabez?"

"Yes, father." His great form was outlined like a silhouette on the threshold, his deep voice vibrated as he answered.

"Then come here. Jacob is back. I am holding his hand here by the hearth."

Jabez went up and welcomed the prodigal.

Such a good-looking prodigal as he was, with the boldest, merriest eyes, and a forehead as white as a girl's, and the frankest laugh, and the easiest way of bearing himself! Jabez was struck dumb with admiration, through which a little surprise ran. If people grew like this through disobedience and waywardness, of what use was it to stay at home dutifully, and grow dull as a clod toiling for the old acres and the old roof?

But in his wonder there was no germ of envy. He was proud that Jacob had redeemed the past, as he must have done if the tales of high heroism he told were true; proud and triumphant that such a splendid figure as his soldier-brother had entered on the scene of his life at its most dramatic moment. Of course there were bad things in Jacob's past, but Jabez was not the man to cherish old scores against the repentant.

Of course he told Jacob all about Jessie, and took him to see her, and introduced him. And Jacob praised her warmly—a little too warmly indeed, but perhaps that was only because Jabez was taciturn and sensitive.

Jacob had a month's furlough, and it was harvest-time, and Jabez was busy; and so the soldier devoted himself to his brother's sweetheart, and the sweetheart met the devotion prettily.

It was the last night of Jacob's stay at home. Jessie had come up to the farm early in the day, and had been in the gayest, merriest mood, flitting here and there like a butterfly, assuming pretty airs of authority in the house, petting old Hiram in a filial way, and bewitching her lover.

Towards nightfall she spoke of going home, and both brothers volunteered their company. She walked between them, giving her hand to Jabez at rough places, and holding it a little afterwards.

For once Jacob's fluent tongue was silent, and Jabez never had much to say, and so the burden of the discourse fell to Jessie, who bore it merrily. Had she seemed once to fail or falter, Jabez could have forgiven her better afterwards.

On the way home Jacob recovered his spirits and his tongue, and boasted carelessly, planting thorns in his brother's heart that would rankle during a lifetime.

With the next morning's dawn, while Jabez was still sleeping the dreamless sleep of weariness, Jacob Gaunt and Jessie Dean were speeding away from him together.

It took Jabez a long time to realise what had befallen him. To his loyal nature treachery was incomprehensible, and treachery from these two of all the world! Why, they must have been deceiving him from the very outset; she with her pretty blandishments and caresses; he with his frank, fraternal criticism. And that very walk that he and Jacob had taken to Groomsport but two days before, that was that the traitor might make final arrangements for his flight. Jabez felt as if they had killed him—killed every kind and human instinct in his breast, and at their door he laid the ruins of his better self.

He had no desire to follow them, and avenge himself. As their crime was beyond his comprehension, so their punishment was beyond his arm. He left them grimly to Heaven, ready to yield his faith in that too, unless Heaven meted them out a just reward.

It was after this that Jabez Gaunt grew an old man. He was only thirty, but a dead heart lines the face, and bows the shoulders, and renders a man weary of the sun.

He had no one to talk to, no one who could lighten his pain in sharing it. Once or twice his father had asked fretfully where Jessie was, and when Jabez had answered briefly that Jessie had gone off with Jacob, he had fallen to murmuring to himself of the fine lad Jacob was.

"But she was my promised wife," Jabez had burst forth once, in his intolerable pain; whereat the old man shook his head, and muttered: "Aye, aye, the Deans were ever treacherous. I could have told thee that always, but it is not the way of the young nowadays to seek counsel of the old;" and so muttering had sunk back into the indifference of old age.

CHAPTER II.

Two, three, four years passed without bringing much change to the hill-farm.

Old Hiram was hopelessly in his dotage now, with the circle of his pleasures narrowed down to basking in the sun in the summer-time, or sitting in a bent and

drooping attitude by the hearth when wintry blasts shook the casements.

Martha, who had been the "help" at the farm when Jabez was a baby, saw to the butter and cream, and cooked the homely meals, and practised on herself and others the small economies inculcated by long years of scanty earnings and few possessions.

As to Jabez, he was quite old now—old and indifferent to all but the matters of routine that lent form to his empty days. His face had a withered look, his eye was hollow and cold, and the line of his lips had grown narrow, as it does where the affections are meagre and the sympathies few.

It was a bleak November morning; the icy blast like a great sickle swept the hills, and everything that lived cowered backward from its reach. Jabez had slept badly that night; the growling of the mastiff had disturbed him, and the thought of prowlers about had disturbed him more. But it was a bitter night, and this queer, odd man thought that only cruel necessity had set thieves afoot in such weather, and that whatever they could lay their hands on they needed more than he did. So he had lain awake listening and thinking till it was almost morning; then he got up and unfastened the door to look out; he wanted to see what his pitiful mood had led him to lose. But as his hand lifted the latch, something propped against the door rolled forward and fell at his feet.

It was too dark for him to distinguish what it was, but as he stooped to lift it, it uttered a cry.

"A child!" Jabez Gaunt said to himself, trembling—he could not tell why.

He struck a light and laid the half-frozen thing on the table, and looked at it.

A letter, addressed to himself, was pinned to its breast; then he understood. He detached the letter and secreted it; then he called old Martha. When she had come he pointed to the child. "A foundling left to perish," he said. "Keep it till we hear further." Then he went out to feed the cattle.

All day long the letter lay unread in his pocket, and Martha's questions were answered indifferently. He had found the child on the threshold, and had carried it in; after that she knew more than he did.

"A beggar's brat," old Martha sniffed wrathfully. "I shall send it to the work-house."

"Not till I tell you," Jabez said, and went back to his labours.

He kept the letter unread for a week, until the child had shown itself good-tempered, and healthy, and pretty, as far as he could judge, and until old Martha had reluctantly admitted that by-and-by it would be less trouble; then, when its footing was secure, he unfolded the message it brought, and read it with a shudder of repugnance and pain.

"You need not hate me now," Jessie Dean wrote. "I have suffered enough. He left me a year ago. I have tried to feed myself and the child and live honestly, but I can't, so I bring her to you, and leave her in your hands. Whatever you do with her will be right; you were always just. I have nothing but her, and I give her up to you—it is my punishment." There was no signature, but none was needed.

Jabez Gaunt read the blurred lines in silence; then he flung the paper into the flames. It was years before he remembered that he had destroyed the sole proof, such as it was, of Janet's identity.

The child remained on at the farmhouse, and existed somehow. Such a poor little child as she was, with a long, sad face, and lank, light hair, and a furtive habit of gliding out of the way when anyone looked at her. No one liked her, no one desired her. To Martha she was a nuisance, one more mouth to feed, one more body to cater for; to Jabez she was an odious fragment left from the wreck of his fair possibilities; to old Hiram she was a little torment, constantly making overtures of friendship, constantly needing to be repulsed.

In all her childhood she never had a playfellow; in all her youth she never had a companion. No one reasoned about it, but unconsciously they all conspired against the irrepressible vitality that was in her. Life had tyrannised over Jabez, and unwittingly Jabez had become a tyrant in his turn.

But they could not suppress the activity that sent her scampering across the hills when the wind blew, and gave her the colts and young cattle for friends; and they could not uproot the affections that, strong as ivy, must cling to something.

It is hard to be fond through repulsion, and aversion, and avoidance; there must have been some adamant element in Janet's nature when, in spite of himself, it was possible for her to idealise Jabez Gaunt.

He never suspected it—how could he?—but it was to please him that Janet learned to milk, and knit, and spin, to attend the poultry, and dig and hoe in the garden; to cut potatoes for planting, and to acquit herself so well in the multifarious employments of a farm, that old Martha, in an unguarded moment, let out to Jabez that she was of more value than any hired girl.

"Then she shall have the hired girl's wage," Jabez said, and called her to him, and put a sovereign in her hand.

"You shall have that every quarter-day," he said.

Janet looked at him, her mouth trembling, and the tears smarting her eyeballs. He had paid her like a hired girl—actually like a hired girl—and she had thought she was something more, and better. She took the money out to the hay-field, and hid it and herself among the hay, and then cried herself into a lethargy.

But why should he not pay her? What was she better than the hired girl? Who had told her she was of his race—why had she ever suspected it?

She thought of this problem all that evening. Next day, when the cattle had gone out to pasture, and her morning's work was over, Janet started on an enterprise bolder to her timidity than that of Christopher Columbus.

The valley below the farm was an undiscovered country to her; she would not only invade it, but make friends with an inhabitant, and find out why Jabez Gaunt had paid her wages.

Mrs. Brown, of the little cottage just below the farm, was feeding a brood of young chickens that morning by the fire, when the door opened suddenly, and Jabez Gaunt's foundling came in. Her short skirts were tucked up for rapid running, her light hair was blown backward from her sharp face, and her breath came hurriedly.

"Lawk a mussy, child!" Mrs. Brown raised her hands in bewilderment. The girl's presence was alarming, as the unusual always is.

"I want to know what Jabez Gaunt is to me?" the girl burst forth, eager not to waste a second.

"Jabez!"

"Yes; am I anything to him, or am I a hired girl like another?"

"Sit ye down, deary, and I'll tell ye all I know," Mrs. Brown said coaxingly. It was not often an opportunity of making a sensation came so easily within her grasp.

"I'm in haste," Janet said doggedly. "Unless you can tell me what I want to know, I must be going."

Mrs. Brown was in a difficulty. She knew just as little about Jabez Gaunt and Janet as anyone else; but then, like all the neighbours, she had a whole treasure-house of opinions and surmises, and the prospect of opening it to this pale, eager girl was delicious. It was dangerous to be too fluent with the name of Jabez Gaunt, but the present opportunity, once lost, would be beyond recall; and then, was it not fair and right that Janet should learn something of herself?

"Why have you come to ask me?" she enquired, with suspicion born of her embarrassment.

"Because you were the nearest."

"And if I tell you what you don't like?"

"I only ask for the truth."

"I can give you no facts, remember; only opinions."

"If you tell me all you know, you can do no more."

Thus encouraged, Mrs. Brown told her tale of Jabez Gaunt's wrongs, and her suspicion that Janet was the child of Jacob and Jessie, found by him somehow, and saved because of the pity in him.

Janet stood by the door listening, and suffering, as only the young can. This was the punishment of her arrogance, and pride, and impatience—the knowledge that she was the child of traitors, and hurtful and horrible. At best she was but a foundling saved through charity; at worst she was the child of Jabez Gaunt's enemies. What a dreadful place the world was, since it harboured villains and let traitors go unpunished! What good was there for her to hate falsehood when the man and woman whose names were a bye-word still were her father and mother? Janet felt herself suddenly grown old and hopeless, and found herself stupidly wondering if it was only yesterday that she had raced with the young colt across the common, and sought blue-bottles amid the swaying corn.

"You'll not tell what I've told you, dear?" Mrs. Brown said, awed by the pale face and wide-open eyes that fronted her.

"Of course not."

She stirred as though awakened, passed her hand across her eyes, and then, with a word of muttered thanks, turned away.

It was after this that Janet's crisp brightness deserted her. Like all sensitive

natures, she was shy at self-justification, and now the consciousness of an inherited misdoing oppressed her. No wonder Jabez hated her; the only wonder was that he could bear her, even as a servant, in his presence. As to her, she only loved him better for his long martyrdom. But she must never show him that; her approval would be only added pain.

Jabez saw a change in Janet as the months passed. The old hostility between her and Martha was over, and the old bursts of irrepressible mirth, which had once jarred on him horribly, were silenced. Sorrow had touched Janet somehow. Could it be a love sorrow? he asked himself with a heart pang.

That was the one pain which Jabez regarded as never-ending, the one pain that was too cruel even for Jacob's child. Unconsciously to himself, he took to watching her furtively; unconsciously to himself he learned that Janet's life was laid on simple lines, and that all her thoughts were noble.

Old Hiram had been dead many years now; Martha was ageing fast, and as small duties fell from her relaxing clasp, Janet picked them up, and made them her own, uncomplainingly, willingly, as the merest matter of course.

Janet's character appealed to every sympathy Jabez had got. It was his own, in its silence, and strength, and self-abnegation. And yet she was the child of Jacob and Jessie Dean! Jabez could not understand it, and would not see that the bitter years had given him a blessing in spite of himself.

At eighteen Janet had been a plain girl; at five-and-twenty she was a handsome woman, stately, serene, reserved, carrying herself with unconscious pride, and walking with the free step of the hill-women. Jabez saw this too, and by-and-by other men saw it as well as Jabez; and one day young Eben Guthrie, from Brook Farm, stepped up the hillside boldly, and asked her straight out from Jabez as his wife.

"Let her decide for herself," Jabez said, turning away with feigned indifference.

And she did decide—that she would live with Jabez always; that she had no wish for love or marriage; that she was happy as she was.

Eben took his dismissal in good part. Where there is no rival, patience becomes easy. Eben was prepared to wait.

Things went on quietly at the hill-farm, and by-and-by old Martha died, and Janet

stepped into her place naturally. She still received her quarterly wage, and she still told herself she was the hired girl; but she wore a bonnet and a merino gown on Sundays, which no hired girl had ever done, and had trim aprons for the evening, and sat opposite Jabez to do her knitting after sunset.

Once Jabez, looking at her as she sat working in the firelight, said suddenly:

"My mother's room is empty; why not use it? It will be handier than the loft."

"So it will," Janet answered sedately.

But she trembled as though a sudden caress had touched her. He permitted her to take his mother's room—then he acknowledged her as a relative.

CHAPTER III.

THERE were three years of this peaceful life; three years of busy days and restful evenings; three years in which a drive to church was an outing, and the harvest-home a festival; three years in which the only acrid drop was that quarterly payment, made and accepted.

Jabez liked and needed her, the neighbours always spoke of her as his niece, and Eben Guthrie was faithful. It was the happy time of Janet's life; and then, suddenly, without warning, it was over, and Jabez Gaunt lay dying.

He had been out in the harvest-field watching the men at work as was his way, admonishing a laggard, directing the unskilled, proving himself eye, and ear, and judgment, when suddenly annihilation seemed to fall on his small world, and he lay among the sheaves, agonising in impotent effort and conscious defeat.

The reapers clustered round him, issuing a hundred conflicting orders, offering a hundred useless suggestions; their slow tongues fluent with comment, and question, and surmise.

What had befallen him? Was it apoplexy, was it paralysis, was it death? Had anyone suspected his seizure? Was anyone prepared for it? What would Janet say? As Jabez lay on the stubble, staring with sightless eyes up at the sky, the rustic mind had jumped from that moment to its consequences—the heir-at-law would have the hill-farm, and what would become of Janet?

"I suppose there is no will?" one hopeless person suggested in an awed whisper.

"Jabez Gaunt make a will! Is that all

you know about him?" was the contemptuous answer.

And then the door, for which a messenger had been dispatched, was brought, and the old man was laid on it, and with his face turned blankly up to the red sky, he was carried home.

By-and-by the doctor came and looked at him, and shook his head. There was nothing to be done.

Neighbour-women came to sit by Janet, and wipe their eyes, and talk in whispers, discussing her and her prospects in her absence. Jabez had never acknowledged her, and there was no will; what would become of her?

"He paid her as a servant; has she saved aught?" they asked each other.

"Who knows?—a pound or two, maybe; but it was more like her to put the money he gave her back into the housekeeping. Eh! but he was a curmudgeon to her always, and if he had been her own father she could not have loved him more."

"And to think of all he has going to a shopkeeper in the town, to deck out a lot of dressy lasses, and portion them for marriage."

"An' the poor lass thinkin' it a joy to serve him."

"But he brought her up," one protested faintly.

"Aye, but she paid for her keep since she was able to toddle. Don't I mind her herding the geese out of the corn, when she was just old enough to cross the ridges without falling?"

"And to think that he never asked himself what was to become of her after his death."

"Maybe he thought no harm could come to a brave heart like Janet."

"Most likely he never thought of her at all." And then they sighed in concert, shaking their heads.

That day, towards noon, the heir-at-law came; a burly, prosperous person, with a keen eye to his personal advantage, and a thorough comprehension of the value of the oxen in the sheds, and the corn stacked and standing. He had come on business, to learn the worth of his inheritance, and to make sure that little could be carried off without his knowledge before he came into possession. He went through the house appraising, looking at the linen in the oak presses, at the old silver, at the china in the cupboards; reckoning the value of the sheep on the hills, and the cattle in the sheds, and computing the developments of

which his business was capable when the price of Jabez Gaunt's possessions was poured into it.

He spoke with friendly condescension to the farm-labourers, and Janet saw scornfully how they deferred to him as the coming master. What time-servers they were! But no heart had ever loved Jabez but her own. And now he was slipping away from her—going out into the darkness where her love could not follow him.

She hated the rotund, rosy person who was to be his successor, she felt his presence in the death-chamber a desecration, as he stood with his hands in his pockets, whistling softly through his shut teeth. In his eyes death was very natural, and the death of an old man who had lived frugally and amassed money, was very beautiful. The heir-at-law meant no disrespect as he stood by Jabez Gaunt's death-bed, and thought of the future.

"I wonder is there any neighbour who would take the land at a fair value," he said, turning to Janet, and putting the uppermost thought into words.

He spoke softly, and bore himself decorously, and therefore the blazing eyes that she turned on him surprised as much as they startled him.

"Let the breath be out of his body before you dispose of his possessions," she said with a wild burst of tears.

He looked at her with new interest.

"Who are you, my good young woman?" he said condescendingly.

"I am nothing; never mind about me."

"H'm! nothing, yet so sorry! Have you lived here long?"

"Always—ever since I was a little child. But what does that matter to you?"

Mr. Jewlett stared her all over, traced something of the bearing of old Jabez in her, and drew his own conclusions. For the first time it struck him as very odd that Jabez had made no will. But possibly there was a will. The thought fell on him like a cold rain, and his golden visions seemed to shrink and shrivel.

But there was no will, never had been, and Jabez Gaunt lay as conscious of that fact, and all its consequences, as he had ever been of anything in his life. The acres that he loved with a personal affection would be sold by a stranger; the household gods would be scattered to the four winds; and Janet, the one human being who had ever loved him for himself, would be left, not only unprovided for, but unacknowledged.

His heart was aflame with rage and

despair; the anguish in him was strong enough to utter itself trumpet-tongued; passion, like a whirlwind, was battling in his brain; and all the time he lay inert and dead as a stone, his feeble pulse scarcely stirring in his chill body. Oh, to move, to utter a sound—to speak one sentence! Too late! For years he had kept silence, priding himself on it, and now—now!

Where was Jacob? where was Jessie? Why did this smug person call himself his heir, and appraise his possessions, and desire his death? Was his brother dead—the brother who had wronged him?—and, if so, how could he tell the world that Janet was Jacob's child? And even if he told it, and it was disputed, how could he prove it now?

He could not utter a sound, but all the time he was crying from the bottom of his heart that Heaven would retard the stroke of his doom, and give him one hour of conscious life again.

"I have no right to pray; my whole life has been selfish and wrong; it is for Janet's sake I crave a boon, as the vilest may. One hour of life for Janet's sake!"

If fervour could force itself an utterance, the prayer was heard. The twisted face stirred on the pillow, the heavy eyelids slowly unclosed, and two words came from the stiff lips:

"A clergyman!"

With the cry of a relieved criminal, Janet was at his side.

"You are better; say you are better, and will live!"

His eyes sought her face in anguish. His tone thrilled with the agony of its entreaty:

"A clergyman! Time is short."

He wanted spiritual consolation; at last his mind was tending towards holy things. In ten seconds a boy was speeding like the wind down the hillside, and Janet had returned to her vigil by the bed.

He could not talk—not through pain of body, but through distress of mind. Was there time? Would someone come to do as he wished? No one on the hill-farm could write but Janet and the stranger. A will written by Janet in her own favour would be valueless, and how could he trust the man who called himself his heir?

"Pray for time," he whispered laboriously after a long pause. Then again later:

"Who went?"

"Ned."

He drew a breath of relief, and his

quickened vision seemed to see the boy scudding like a hare across the country. He saw him approach the parsonage door and knock, and turn away disappointed. Where was the clergyman? Could he find him? Would there be time?

"Pray," he kept whispering, and she prayed for life for him, for length of days, for pardon if there was aught sinful in his past. And still the moments dragged past, and the big clock in the kitchen ticked remorselessly on, and Jabez's life-sand kept falling—falling.

The cold perspiration had broken on his forehead, and was trickling like tears on to the pillow; his weak hands feebly twisted each other as he prayed, and his voice found utterance at intervals, asking in agony for time. And the crowd gathered gaping by the door, wondered what awful secret on Jabez Gaunt's soul made his parting from the body so bitter. And then suddenly there was a deeper hush in the anteroom, the crowd parted from about the door, and Mr. Lydgate stepped into the old man's presence.

"I am here, Mr. Gaunt."

"Yes; go, Janet."

The door closed behind her, and then the sick man's eyes fixed themselves with magnetical force on the clergyman's face, and drew him like cords towards him, till the faltering tones became audible:

"Pen, paper—write my will."

Mr. Lydgate was horribly disappointed. He had half expected to hear the secret of a sin-burdened soul, at any rate to be called on for spiritual consolation; and old Jabez, thinking of earthly things under the circumstances, was downright profane.

"I had thought your soul——" he began admonishingly.

And then Jabez made his terrible answer:

"I care less for my soul than for justice. Write!"

And Mr. Lydgate did write, after all legal formula:

"To my niece, Janet Gaunt, who has lived with me all her life, I bequeath all I possess in the world, personal and chattel property, stock, crop, money in the bank, in bonds, and in land, for her sole use and benefit."

"Now call witnesses and let me sign."

The trembling hand clutched the pen, the signature was executed weakly, and then old Jabez Gaunt gave a sigh and fell back on his pillow.

Dead! No, not dead, nor likely to die

for years. The doctor called it a miracle, but doctors are like other people, and sometimes term the unusual miraculous. Jabez seemed to take a new lease of life from the hour that he held Death at bay for Janet's sake. But he never was the hale man he had been, and, before the toil of the winter came round, it was found needful that a neighbour should assist him in his labour. And what neighbour so willing as Eben Guthrie?

The hill-farm and the brook-farm adjoined, and so it was found expedient to work the two together, and by-and-by, the hill-farm being the bigger, Eben came to live where he was needed most, and in time, he and Jabez having become the best of friends—why, in time Eben married Janet, and all the sad old memories at the farm died out in a sound of wedding-bells.

LUCY GREY.

By A. M. DALE.

CHAPTER I.

It was a dark, rainy morning early in November, and I stood at the dining-room window, and looked out at the wet, motionless evergreens, the sodden grass, and the black and leafless trees, to which the fog clung dismally. It was a dreadful, dreary day! Yet, ought any outward influences, however depressing, to have had the power to depress a bride of only six weeks' standing—a bride who had come to her new home from her wedding-tour only the day before? And, perhaps, this wretched day did not depress me; perhaps if it had been a sunny summer's day, and I had looked out upon leafy trees, and a garden gay with flowers, and listened to the song of birds instead of the splashing of the rain, I should have felt just as miserable as I was feeling now. For I had been married only six weeks, and I already knew that it would have been better for me if I had not been married at all. Better—much better; for I loved my husband passionately, and I knew to-day that he did not love me, and had never loved me. I thought it all over as I stood by the window and watched the rain, and the memory of the past summer, once so sweet, had lost its sweetness now. And I wondered at the blindness that had prevented me from seeing that which was so palpable

to all my wakeful, quivering senses now. Of course he did not love me! How could I ever have deceived myself so far as to suppose he did?

He was an artist, and his name was already well-known. He had stayed at our little village on one of his sketching expeditions, and, being slightly known to our vicar, that hospitable gentleman threw open his doors to him, and it was at his house that he—Lionel Prynne—and I first met. He had been educated for a doctor, and had taken his degree, and practised for a few years in a country town; but having a small fortune left him, he gave up his profession, and turned to the one pursuit he really loved—his painting.

I was only nineteen when he paid his visit to our village, and I was a very unsophisticated damsel indeed. I lived with a deaf old maiden-aunt, and I had never been away from home in my life except for the two years I had spent at a "finishing" school. I had read many novels, and had worshipped the heroes thereof; but my ideas of the outside world were of the vaguest, and it was no wonder when a real live hero like Lionel Prynne presented himself before me, that I fell down and worshipped him at once. And it was only very ordinary kindness on his part that changed a silly girlish adoration to a woman's true and abiding love. He was one whom any woman might have loved, for his gentle and courteous ways had even a greater attraction than his somewhat sad but undeniably handsome face. He had dark, waving hair, which he wore rather long, and very large, dark eyes—eyes that seemed capable of expressing the deepest tenderness or strongest passion, but which habitually wore a sad, absent expression which never altered, and he did not seem to be a happy man. I was a merry, sociable girl, and when I got over my first timidity with him, he seemed amused with me, and to like my companionship. And then he asked me to marry him.

As I stood looking at the wet laurels this morning, I felt I could understand why he had liked me; my merry chatter had diverted his attention, and caused him to forget his troubles sometimes; and my innocent and unconcealed admiration of all his sayings and doings had naturally won upon his heart, and caused him to find pleasure in my society; but of the love a man should feel towards the woman he makes his wife, he had none—I could see it plainly now. Even during the days of

our engagement, he never praised me; never took any interest in my thoughts or feelings; never asked a single question about my past life, or anything concerning me, and never once spoke a word of love!

My love, however, blinded me to all these shortcomings, and supplied all his deficiencies, for I was too happy and proud to notice anything wrong, and I was happy—oh, so happy, those few short weeks. But, when we were married, I soon began to doubt, for I was taken into his confidence no more than formerly, and his heart and mind remained a sealed book to me. And never in all my lonely life had I really known what loneliness was until I was on my wedding-tour! I sat by my husband's side while he sketched, and he was so absorbed in his work that he seemed to forget my very existence. Once or twice I ventured on some show of resentment, but I might as well have shown resentment against the waves at my feet, for he never noticed me, and it made no difference to him whether I was silent or gay, and I slowly but surely realised the fact that in all his life there was no need of me. He did not mean to be unkind, and when he remembered me he had always a word and smile for me; but the effort was so palpable that such notice hurt me worse than his neglect.

But I determined to act as I thought right, and let no suffering deter me from my rigid duty; and, of course, in my heart there nestled warmly a hope that patience on my part would in time win to me entirely my husband's heart. And it was in this spirit and with these hopes that I returned to my new home, which was a pretty house, situated on the hilly side of a romantic and picturesque glen in one of the most beautiful counties of England. My husband had bought this little out-of-the-way nook when he gave up his practice and became an artist, and here he had lived alone for one or two years before he married me.

It was six o'clock on a November evening when we arrived at home, for we had lingered by the sea as long as the weather continued fine, and October had been unusually beautiful that year; but when the rain began to fall and colder winds to blow, we returned home at once. We had had a very long journey, and were almost tired out when we reached home, and it was too dark for me to see how beautifully my new home was placed—indeed, the impression made upon my mind was not agreeable—it was of nothing but wet trees tossing in

the wind and rain. Inside, however, it was bright enough, and I could see how perfect and artistic it all was; but Lionel said he was too tired to show me round that night, and would do so on the morrow. I also was very tired, and went wearily upstairs to change my wet and travel-stained garments, and when I came down into the dining-room again, Lionel was lying asleep on the couch beside the bright fire. A tempting repast was spread upon the table, but I felt unwilling to awaken Lionel, he seemed so soundly asleep. I stood beside him, and looked down into his face, and I thought how sad and careworn he looked, even in sleep, and with an impulse of pitying love I pushed the dark hair tenderly from his forehead, and bent and kissed him. This did not wake him, but caused him to stir uneasily and utter some low words. I bent down to hear what he said.

"Lucy," he murmured tenderly; "Lucy."

I drew back as if he had struck me a blow. Yet what was there in that tenderly-breathed name to drive the blood from my heart, as if a hand of ice had suddenly grasped it? Only this—my name was not Lucy, and no one had ever called me so!

How long I stood there in silence I do not know; but when I unloosed my hands, which I had clasped before me, they were rigid and stiff with long pressure, and I had had time to think of a great many things and to realise it all. Lucy, Lucy! who was Lucy? And why had my gentle touch brought her name to his lips? Had she ever touched him so? At this thought I again drew near my husband, and again smoothed back the wavy hair. He moved again; he evidently made an effort to awaken from some distressing dream.

"Lucy, Lucy, come back to me!" he groaned, and I bent my head to catch the low, broken words. "Come back to me or I must die! Lucy, my darling—Lucy Grey!"

Then he awoke with a start, and stared at me vaguely.

"Oh, Marjorie!" he said absently.

"Yes," I replied bitterly; "Marjorie, not——" but I checked myself in time, and remembered my good resolutions. "Tea is ready," I said wearily.

He arose with a sigh, and took his place at the table. And this first meal in my new home was a very silent one indeed.

In the morning Lionel showed me round the house; it was perfect in every way, but this only saddened me the more, for it

made me feel how happy and blessed I might have been if only I could have known that its beauty and perfection had been prepared for me.

It was too wet for us to go out of doors, and when we had finished our tour of inspection, Lionel retired to his studio, and I stood looking out at the rain as I have described, and feeling too forlorn, and miserable, and utterly heart-broken for any words to express. And one name seemed written on everything alike—on dreary trees and dreary sky; and the drip of the rain and the murmur of the fire seemed to say it: Lucy Grey—nothing but Lucy Grey.

CHAPTER II.

AND now a dreary life began for me. My home, though so picturesque and romantic, was lonely in the extreme. No other houses were near us, and the village was a mile away. Had Lionel loved me or made me his companion, I should have wished for nothing different; but he shut himself up in his studio all day and every day, and as week after week passed he grew less and less mindful of any duty towards me, and left me utterly alone. I had no society at all; the village was but a cluster of poor cottages, and the only educated people there were the rector and his wife—Mr. and Mrs. Lee—and they were not an exhilarating couple. They called upon us shortly after our return home, and although Mr. Lee seemed a pleasant, kindly-hearted little man, his wife was an appalling woman, and he stood too much in awe of her to be able to assert any individuality of his own when in her presence. She was a tall, large-boned woman, holding herself rigidly erect, and wearing a gloomy and depressing expression of countenance. She seemed to be a firm believer in the total depravity of the human race, and to glory in it. She had evidently the firmest persuasion that all she did was right, and that all anybody else did was wrong, and she had grown sour and embittered from the constant incapability of everybody else to see this patent fact, repeatedly as she put it to the fore. She sighed when she was introduced to me, and shook her head solemnly, and when in the course of our conversation I remarked that I feared I should find Glen House lonely, she sighed again, and said:

"We have all our trials, Mrs. Prynne,

and should take them as the fitting reward of our sins. No doubt you have been frivolous and fond of society, and this loneliness of which you complain will, I trust, have a beneficial effect upon you. You must not expect to have everything just as you want it in this world, Mrs. Prynne."

"I was not complaining, Mrs. Lee," I answered in mild surprise; "I merely said I feared I might find it a little dull."

"I am not deaf, Mrs. Prynne; no—but if I had given myself to the habit of listening to scandal and idle gossip, perhaps that affliction might have been visited upon me, as it has been upon so many others; but I never listened to scandal or gossip in my life; and I am not deaf—I heard quite distinctly what you said."

"You have misunderstood me, nevertheless," I remarked.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Prynne, but I never misunderstood anyone in my life;" and she looked at me calmly, as if that speech clinched the matter and annihilated me.

"And," I continued, just to show that I was not annihilated, "I think deafness does not so often arise from listening to scandal and gossip, as from a neglected cold in the head, or carelessly sitting in draughts."

Mrs. Lee rose from her chair, and intimated to her husband, who was talking to Lionel at the other end of the room, that it was time to go home, and one might have supposed from the tone of her voice that something very dreadful indeed had happened.

When they were gone, I told Lionel that I did not like Mrs. Lee.

"Indeed," he answered with his usual indifference; "I thought she was a very worthy woman. I know she does a great deal of work for the poor."

And I afterwards found that Mrs. Lee was always ready to help in sickness and sorrow; but she did it in such an ungracious way, and let it be so plainly seen that she did it merely because she considered it her duty, and not from any kindly impulse of her own, that she had every justification for her complaints of the ingratitude and thanklessness of the people she befriended; for those who had received favours from her seemed to dislike her more than those who had received none, so much did she mix words of bitterness with her otherwise kindly help. So, although she and I visited one another, and were on civil

terms, I never grew to like her, and I always preferred loneliness to her society.

In April my husband and I went up to London for the opening of the Royal Academy. It was my first visit to London, and I naturally felt some excitement; but Lionel was absent and apathetic as usual, and seemed rather annoyed with my eagerness, for, as I had discovered now, he was of a very irritable temper, and easily put out over very small matters, and sometimes it was impossible to avoid displeasing him, although I studied his slightest wish, feeling, as I always did, that nothing was too great for me to do, or suffer, if only I could have had the reward of seeing him loving and happy. But this reward was never mine. It seemed to me that nothing could please him or make him happy, and sometimes I feared that his gloom and irritability grew greater instead of less. Even the success of his picture seemed to give him no pleasure, and when a nobleman wanted to buy it, he appeared more annoyed than gratified, and refused to sell it, and I had never seen Lionel appear to so little advantage as he did, when they—the Earl and Countess of Chesterville—called to make the offer for it.

We were in our sitting-room at the hotel, just ready to start for the Academy, when they were announced. I had never been in the presence of a titled personage before, and I felt embarrassed and shy. I knew Lionel was not troubled with embarrassment, but, nevertheless, the ungraciousness of his manner amounted almost to discourtesy, and I regarded him with surprise, for both our visitors impressed me most favourably, and I saw nothing to account for Lionel's strange unpleasantness.

The earl was a courteous, middle-aged gentleman, and he held out his hand to Lionel in quite a friendly way. "Mr. Prynne, I believe?" he said pleasantly.

Lionel bowed, and either did not or would not see the outstretched hand; and the Earl drew it back and then introduced his wife, Lady Chesterville.

"Lady Chesterville has taken a fancy to your picture in the Academy," he said; "and we have called this morning to know if it is for sale."

"It is not for sale," replied Lionel coldly, and I looked at him in surprise, for he had told me he hoped to get five hundred pounds for it.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the Earl; "I have been misinformed."

Lionel did not speak, and, to cover his incivility, I pushed a chair towards the Earl.

"Pray be seated, Lord Chesterville," I said.

He turned to me with a pleasant smile.

"Thank you, my dear," he said; and turning to Lionel again, continued: "Your wife, I presume?"

"Yes," answered Lionel stiffly.

I now offered Lady Chesterville a chair, but she did not take any notice. She was not friendly, like her husband, but I thought she had the most beautiful face I had ever seen—a face perfect in all but its expression, which was so haughtily cold that it made the face seem as if cut out of stone. She was much younger than her husband, and did not look more than five-and-twenty; but her manners were as stonily cold as her beautiful face. She took no notice of me throughout the interview; after a first cold glance, she never even looked at me.

"If Mr. Prynne does not wish to sell his picture," she said to her husband, "there is no need for us to stay."

"No, my dear—of course not," replied the Earl, evidently feeling rebuffed; "but I should have liked the picture. Are you quite sure you will not sell it?" to Lionel.

"Quite sure," answered Lionel.

The Earl turned to his wife.

"Then, my dear, I cannot gratify you," he remarked; "you must do without the picture."

"I do not want the picture," said her ladyship sharply and haughtily; "I never wanted it!"

Lionel smiled—a most unpleasant smile—and then he bowed them from the room.

"Oh, Lionel," I burst forth as soon as the door had closed upon them, "how could you treat them so? And he was so friendly, and she so beautiful! How could you do it?"

Lionel turned quickly, and looked at me with such furious anger in his eyes that I drew back with a little cry. His right hand was clenched, and it trembled a little as he looked at me.

I burst into tears.

"Oh, Lionel, don't look at me like that!" I sobbed piteously. "I did not mean to vex you!"

"Don't be a child," he answered sternly, "nor provoke me more than I can bear."

"I did not mean to provoke you," I said, stifling my sobs as best I could, for I loved

him so devotedly, so entirely, that I would have done anything to have won a kind word from him, and an unkind one seemed more than I could bear. I dried my tears as hastily as possible, for I knew how complaining on my part angered him, and he walked restlessly up and down the room until my eyes were dry, and I was ready to accompany him to the Academy; but I knew his restlessness was not caused by any feeling of pity for me.

We returned home about the end of May, and my lonely, monotonous life began again. During the summer months we travelled about a little for Lionel to sketch, but life, wherever it might be, was all the same to me—lonely and repressed. Lionel was entirely self-absorbed; he had no need of me, and it never seemed to enter his mind that I had any need of him. He had married me, and provided me with a pretty home, and he seemed to think—if he ever thought about the matter at all—that his duty was done. He knew nothing of the bitter tears I daily shed—and if he had known he would only have been astonished and annoyed; he would not have tried to comfort me, or make me happier.

I often thought about Lucy Grey, for since that first time I had frequently heard Lionel murmuring her name in his sleep. But I had grown to think about her without bitterness, for I had weaved a romance of my own about them—Lionel had loved her, and she had died. I did not see how else it could have been, and so I was able to think tenderly, though very sadly, about them both. I often felt I should like to know the truth beyond all doubt, and indeed hear all about it, but Lionel never mentioned his past life to me, and I never dared to ask him questions.

CHAPTER III.

IN September, when I had been married a year, a cousin of Lionel's came to stay with us for a few weeks. His name was Geoffrey Hesketh, and he and Lionel had been brought up together, and regarded one another as brothers, and I thought perhaps Geoffrey might some time mention Lucy Grey, and then tell me all about her; but he had not been with us long before I came to the conclusion that he knew nothing of the matter at all. He, like my husband, had been educated for a doctor, and early in life had obtained a situation as surgeon on board a ship, where he had

remained until the ship was wrecked, when he came to us until he got another post; and he and Lionel had not seen one another for seven or eight years. Lionel told me, however, that our home must always be Geoffrey's as long as Geoffrey wanted one.

I was very much pleased with Geoffrey, and he seemed to bring a new and happier life into our dreary home. In looks he was rather like Lionel, but, instead of Lionel's languor, his face was expressive of life and energy. He was of a stronger, sturdier build; his ways were lively and energetic; and he had a singular, brusque way of speaking his thoughts out rather unguardedly, but quite innocently, and without any intention of giving offence. He had a ready, merry laugh, and a good-humour that was very infectious; only, alas! it never infected Lionel.

And it never infected Mrs. Lee. She took a dislike to Geoffrey when first she saw him, as she did to everything cheerful or happy, and, as Geoffrey quite reciprocated her feelings, there was a continual sparring between them whenever they met, which sometimes made me laugh, but oftener made me very uncomfortable, for I was afraid Mr. Lee might be offended on his wife's behalf, and I had grown to like the friendly, mild little man very much, and did not wish to lose his friendship. On this point, however, I soon grew easy, for I began to perceive that his sympathies were on Geoffrey's side, and that he was more annoyed at his wife's persistent unpleasantness than at Geoffrey's defensive mockery and fun.

Geoffrey had not been with us more than two days when he asked me what was amiss with Lionel.

"I do not know that anything is amiss with him," I answered in surprise. "What makes you think there is?"

"He is so dismal—so depressed," said Geoffrey. "He never laughs. Laughs! He never even smiles—no, not at my very best jokes! And he seems to take no interest in anything, and I can't imagine what on earth has come over him."

"Used he to be different?" I asked wistfully.

"Oh, very. He was never lively or talkative, but he was cheerful and good-tempered. He was always somewhat full of fads, and a trifle fidgety, but never irritable like now. Why, he seemed quite put out last night at seeing my dirty boots on the hearthrug."

"You must admit that my white hearthrug was not the most suitable place for them," I remarked with a slight smile.

"I had taken them off there, and someone ought to have taken them away," said Geoffrey.

"I think you want a wife, Geoffrey," I remarked.

"I think so myself, and perhaps, when you have known me a little longer, you will be kind enough to recommend me to one of your bosom friends."

"I have no bosom friends," I said; "and if I had, I am not quite sure that I could recommend you to their tender regards."

"Oh, I'll not leave my boots on the hearthrug again, if that is what you mean," he answered gravely.

"I found your meerschau in my work-basket this morning," I said calmly.

"I'm thankful for that, for I thought I had lost it. But I remember shoving it in there when the parson's wife came last night, for, to tell you the truth, the first appearance of that woman startled me. She seems to be searching for your secret sins, and you can't help feeling that she has found them, and knows all about them, and you feel guilty and uncomfortable all through; and somehow I felt it was a dreadful thing to be smoking a pipe, so I popped it in there. I hope it didn't burn anything, and, if you have no objection, I will always put it there, and then I shall know where to find it. 'A place for everything, and everything in its place,' is a very good motto, you know."

"Very. But the place for your meerschau shall not be my work-basket, if it is all the same to you. But about Lionel—what do you think has changed him so?"

"I cannot tell; I have not seen him for seven years. You are much more likely to know than I."

"But did he not write to you in those seven years? Or did you never hear anything about him from others?"

"Ah, now you speak about it, I did once hear a tale about him; but it certainly was not true."

"What was it?" I eagerly asked.

"I don't remember the particulars. They said a young lady had jilted him, I think."

"And why do you say it was not true?"

"Because I see with my own eyes that

you have not jilted him—you have married him."

He looked at me innocently. It certainly never entered his mind to suppose there had been any other "young lady" in the case.

I felt my cheeks flush painfully, and I saw a sudden look of suspicion come into Geoffrey's eyes—a suspicion that I was, perhaps, the thorn in his cousin's side.

"Lionel is a very good fellow," he said gravely, "and I don't like to see him so miserable."

"Perhaps your visit will cheer him up," I said with a sigh; and I felt that when I knew Geoffrey a little better, I would take him into my entire confidence, and see if we could not between us find some way of restoring Lionel to a happier state of mind.

But I did not know him well enough yet.

For the next few days I believe Geoffrey watched Lionel and me very closely to see if the cause of Lionel's irritability and unhappiness did really lie with me; and I think he soon saw that Lionel had nothing to complain of in me. I think he soon saw that Lionel might have been very happy if he only would have been; and I think he began to view his conduct with strong disapproval, for when Lionel was more than usually irritable, he would meet him with a determined combativeness that made me fear they would come to a downright quarrel. But Lionel generally gave in, as if it was too much trouble to do anything else. And Geoffrey grew exceedingly kind to me, and we became very good friends, and quietly and unobtrusively he made my life happier in many ways.

A parcel of books came every week from a circulating-library in the nearest town, and although Geoffrey said they were for himself, I knew they were really for me, and he read them to me quite cheerfully in the long evenings when Lionel was shut up as usual in his studio. And Geoffrey always accompanied me on my morning walks to visit the poor, for Mrs. Lee had given me a "district" some ten miles in extent, and I went three mornings a week to read the Bible to a few whining old women, who seemed to think they conferred the favour on me by letting me read, and always took the donation that followed as a little under their proper due.

Geoffrey never entered the cottages with me, but would sit on a wall or tree somewhere near and smoke a quiet pipe.

"I wonder Lionel lets you come down

these lonely lanes and enter these dens all by yourself," he once remarked. "I know I should not if I were him."

"Oh, Lionel does not mind!" I said cheerfully.

"He's a queer fellow," went on Geoffrey thoughtfully; "and if it would not be impertinent, I should really like to know what induced you to marry him."

I laughed a little at this—I could not help it.

"The usual reason, I suppose," I answered quietly.

"You don't mean to say you fell in love with him?" he gasped with an air of sincere amazement.

"I believe that must have been the reason," I said.

"Well," he said slowly, "if I had been a woman, I don't think I should—as he is at present, you know."

"Oh," I exclaimed derisively, "if 'my aunt had been my uncle' it is universally admitted that no one knows what wonderful things might not have happened, and this seems to me a similar case. But instead of telling me the sort of husband you would not like, tell me the sort of wife you would like, and then, perhaps, I may be able to help you."

"Do you think you could find me a facsimile of Mrs. Lee?"

"I am afraid not. I think she stands alone."

"Then I must remain a bachelor."

"I am grieved to hear this, Geoffrey," I replied, "for I know several nice girls who would make good wives."

"You would recommend me now, then?" he asked quickly.

"Oh yes," I answered promptly.

"Well, at least," he said with sudden vehemence, "you might safely say that when I get a wife I shall treat her very much better than Lionel treats his!"

I stopped in my walk, and looked at Geoffrey with bitter reproach.

"You need not have said that," I cried with a swelling heart.

"I beg your pardon, Marjorie—I beg your pardon!" he cried in great distress. "I did not mean to say it—I did not mean to hurt you; but sometimes it is hard to keep a silent tongue."

I walked on in silence; I looked straight before me, and if the landscape was somewhat dim and blurred, I could not help it. That Geoffrey could have been so unkind! I was deeply offended with him, and I did not speak again until we reached home,

and he took my displeasure very humbly, for he knew he deserved it.

At tea-time Lionel was unusually silent, and after repeated attempts at conversation I asked him if he was ill.

"No," he answered shortly, and looked at me quite angrily.

"Then you are over-tired," I said gently, "and you must not work any more to-night. You must stay down here with me."

Lionel went into one of the sudden, unexpected passions that now and again came over him.

"How dare you interfere with me?" he cried, striking the table with his clenched hand. "I have told you before that I will not have it, and I will not!"

I felt my face whiten, and I glanced nervously at Geoffrey, but he was considerate enough not to look at me; indeed, I think he had forgotten me, for he was looking at Lionel with a strange, intent gaze that puzzled me.

"By-the-bye," he said to Lionel, in slow, indifferent tones, "what work is it you are doing that engages you so much! Can you paint by gas-light?"

Lionel uttered a very bad word, and got up and left the room as if in the deepest anger. And Geoffrey sat for a long, long time as if lost in the deepest thought. And he seemed very absent and preoccupied for the next few days. Then one morning he came into my sewing-room, and said he wanted to speak to me.

"Very well, Geoffrey," I said. "Sit down."

He seated himself by the big, square centre-table, put his elbows on it, and rested his chin in his hands, and looked at me. He looked so grave, so unlike himself, that I felt slightly alarmed.

"What is it, Geoffrey?" I asked nervously.

He paused, as if in deep consideration, before he answered, then he said:

"You see you and I have not known one another very long, Marjorie, and I hardly know how you will take what I am going to say. I don't want to frighten you, I don't want to offend you; and if you had a father or a brother I should speak to them and not to you; but you are very lonely and unprotected, Marjorie."

"Nay," I answered with a smile, "never lonely and unprotected, Geoffrey, while I have Lionel and you."

"I am glad you mention me as a protector. Try to imagine I am your brother,

Marjorie; and, believe me, no brother could have your welfare more truly at heart than I have."

"I know that, Geoffrey," I answered somewhat falteringly; "but do say quickly what you have to say, for you are frightening me!"

"I may be mistaken, Marjorie," he said slowly, "but I do not think I am—and it is my very strong opinion that your husband—Lionel—is going out of his mind."

"Going out of his mind, Geoffrey!" I faltered vaguely.

"Yes," answered Geoffrey.

"Do you mean going mad?" I asked faintly.

"I am almost inclined to think he is mad already, Marjorie—melancholy mad, and may, perhaps, become violently so."

"But—your reasons for thinking this?"

"His conduct, and my own experience in such cases. He shuts himself up in his studio all day and every day, and yet he does no work, and when he comes out at meal-times he is morbidly irritable. The very fact of being spoken to annoys him, and a newspaper left on the table, much more my unlucky pipe, throws him into a state of irritation quite painful to see. And would any man in his proper senses destroy his happiness as wilfully and blindly as he is doing?"

"But—going mad! Oh, I am sure you are mistaken, Geoffrey!"

"Then how do you account for his conduct?"

My heart sank heavily.

"I think, Geoffrey," I said quietly, "that Lionel has some great trouble of his own, of which you and I know nothing. I think it is a trouble so great that it absorbs all his faculties, and renders him quite unable to take an interest in anything else."

"What trouble can he have?" asked Geoffrey with a sudden sharp sound in his voice. "My aunt left all her money to him, and he is married to you—what more does he want?"

"I don't know," I answered sadly, but all the same I thought I did know.

Geoffrey walked up and down the room.

"I thought when I first came here and found him in this miserable plight that you had something to do with it—had married him for his money, or something of that sort. But it seems to me you love him with all your heart!"

I burst into tears.

"Oh, Geoffrey," I sobbed, all barriers

broken down under his unfeigned interest and sympathy; "I do—I do, indeed! And even if it is as you think—even if he went mad and killed me—if before he did it, he would give me one kind word, or one kind look, and say he loved me, I should think it worth it all!"

"Oh, Marjorie!" cried Geoffrey with a sort of sob, "and he can treat you as he does! But he is mad—of course he is mad, poor fellow!" he added hastily as if to himself.

I rose up, and seized Geoffrey's hand in my trembling ones.

"I have no one to help me but you, Geoffrey—no one but you has ever spoken to me about my troubles; but since we have spoken so plainly, tell me—oh, tell me, if there is anything I can do—anything you think I can do, to win Lionel's heart—to make him love me just one little bit!"

"Don't speak of him as if he were a sane man, Marjorie," cried Geoffrey vehemently; "don't, my dear! If I thought he was sane I should not stay in his house another hour."

"But what is to become of me if he is mad?" I asked in piteous despair.

"That is what I want to talk to you about," said Geoffrey gently, and he led me to a chair.

I sat down mechanically.

"Well, Geoffrey," I said, with a hopeless ring in my voice, "what would you suggest?"

"I have been negotiating to buy the practice of a doctor in London," began Geoffrey, "and I thought, if you approved, of trying to persuade Lionel to live in London too. Do you think you would like it?"

"Oh, indeed I should!" I cried eagerly; "it would be life itself to me, and if you can persuade Lionel to do it, I shall owe you a very great debt of gratitude."

"Don't you like living here?" queried Geoffrey.

"Like living here!" I cried. "Can you look out of that window, Geoffrey, and ask me that?" and I pointed to the leaden sky, the falling rain, the leafless trees.

"Any country place looks dreary in winter," he said. "But it is pretty here in summer-time, is it not?"

"It is always dreary, whether summer or winter. And it is so lonely. The village is a mile away, and even there I have only Mr. and Mrs. Lee."

"Well," said Geoffrey, "we must see

what Lionel says. And if he will not remove, I think I will stay here a little longer, Marjorie. I do not think you ought to be left alone."

"Oh, Geoffrey, I still think you are quite mistaken. But of course we shall be glad for you to stay."

"And we must try to cheer Lionel a bit. You must not be frightened at his temper, but insist on him going out with you, and having more of your society altogether. And you must try again to persuade him to buy you a piano; music would be good for him, and what objection can he have?"

"He says he hates music, and does not like women to sing."

"You can both sing and play!"

"Oh yes."

"I should like to hear you sing," said Geoffrey thoughtfully.

"I think I have forgotten how," I answered with a sigh, and just then the luncheon-bell rang, and we made our way to the dining-room.

Lionel soon joined us; he looked round the room frowningly, as if seeking something to find fault about, and then he seated himself at the table in silence, and began carving the cold meat. And the sadness and dulness of spirit that his presence always brought came over me as usual, and I sat in dejected silence. Geoffrey alone tried to be sociable.

"Aren't we invited to dine at the parsonage to-night?" he asked cheerily.

"Yes," I answered; "it is Mrs. Lee's birthday, and we must not forget. You will be ready about half-past four, Lionel, will you not?"

"I suppose so," answered Lionel ungraciously.

"And as it is so wet," I went on, "I told John we should need the pony-carriage, and he must put it up at The Golden Bull until we return, for it will not be fit to walk either way."

Lionel made no reply, so I knew my arrangements were accepted.

CHAPTER IV.

WE arrived at the parsonage about five o'clock. Mrs. Lee received us in the drawing-room, for Mr. Lee had only just returned from visiting a sick parishioner, and he was upstairs changing his wet clothes.

As I entered the warm room, I thought what a pleasant contrast it presented to

the wet night outside. But Mrs. Lee seemed uncheered by its comfort, and looked more aggressively austere than usual as Geoffrey shook her hand warmly, and wished her many happy returns of the day.

"I always think it nice to have a jollification on one's birthday," he said cheerily, and I really felt vexed with him, for it seemed so very irreverent to speak of a "jollification" in connection with Mrs. Lee.

The severity of her expression deepened.

"I should be sorry," she said gloomily, "to think of regarding anyone's birthday as a time for a jollification—I believe that was the term you used!—but I certainly approve of birthdays being remembered."

"Do you really?" remarked Geoffrey innocently, but giving me a glance that plainly said he was surprised to hear she approved of anything.

"Yes," she said with her usual sigh; "for I think it is well to be reminded that we are one year nearer the grave."

"Let us say nearer heaven," suggested Geoffrey cheerfully.

But the look on Mrs. Lee's face said plainly that that was by no means what she meant. And Geoffrey looked in my direction again.

Mr. Lee now entered the room, and seemed to bring a cheerier atmosphere with him, and after he had shaken hands all round we went in to dinner.

"I think, my dear," he said to his wife as we began, "that I have a piece of news that will interest you."

Mrs. Lee looked very grim, but made no reply; she did not like it to be supposed she was ever interested in anything.

"I saw it in the Times to-day," the little man said next; but even this elicited no sign of interest in his spouse; she merely tasted her soup, as if she suspected poison, and paid no attention to her husband.

I felt sorry for him.

"Pray let us hear your news, Mr. Lee," I said, "for I dare say it will interest us all."

"Oh no, you don't know the parties; but we do. My dear," again addressing his wife, and this time with a ring of triumph in his tone, "the Countess of Chesterville has at last presented her husband with a son!" and he looked at the stony face opposite to him as if he

expected some sign of life must be shown now.

But he was mistaken.

"Why should I be interested in that?" she asked, staring at him with cold, blank eyes.

"Why, my dear, I always thought you were interested in Miss Grey," he said mildly.

"It has occasionally happened," remarked his wife calmly, "that you have thought wrong."

"I know Lady Chesterville," I cried with eager enthusiasm. "She and her husband once wanted to buy a picture of Lionel's—don't you remember, Lionel?—and I thought her the most beautiful lady I had ever seen. I should like to see her again. Do they live near here, that you know them?"

"Oh no; they live very far away. But we knew the Countess when she was plain Lucy Grey, and only a governess."

My heart gave a sudden, terrible throb, and then seemed to stand still. I glanced at Lionel, and his white, anguish-stricken face told me that I knew the truth at last.

"She was a very beautiful girl," went on Mr. Lee, "but it was said she jilted some young fellow very heartlessly when she had the chance of becoming a countess. But I suspect most women would have done the same in her place—that is," hastily correcting himself as he met his wife's appalling glare, "some women—not most, and certainly not—"

"Mrs. Pryne," interrupted Mrs. Lee sternly, "I think, instead of listening to the praises of Lucy Grey, you will be better employed in looking after your husband, for I am of opinion he is ill."

Lionel's face had grown ghastly white, and as Mrs. Lee spoke, he bowed his head on his hands and groaned as if in bodily agony, while a strong shiver shook him from head to foot.

I was at his side in an instant, and I pressed his head against my breast.

"Oh, Lionel, my darling!" I whispered passionately as I bent my head to his, "why need you care for that false and wicked woman? She never loved you as I do, my darling—never, never!"

But he pushed me angrily away and stood up.

"If you will excuse me, Mrs. Lee," he said, "I will go home. I am not fit to stay."

Geoffrey rose too.

"I will go with you," he said with promptness and decision.

"I shall go alone," said Lionel doggedly.

"Oh no, you are not fit to go alone," answered Geoffrey firmly.

"I must go too," I cried, looking anxiously into Geoffrey's face.

"You can follow in the pony-chaise," he answered, without looking at me; "Lionel and I will walk—it will do him good."

Lionel submitted sullenly and they left at once, and while one of Mrs. Lee's servants went to fetch the pony-carriage, I finished my dinner with what appetite I had. Mr. Lee was full of sympathy for me, but Mrs. Lee simply remarked that she was afraid I had a deal to answer for. This neither surprised nor offended me, for Mrs. Lee always regarded the troubles of other people as distinct punishments for their sins, while each cross of her own was always trumpeted forth as the very immediate forerunner of the crown. But I was glad when the carriage was announced, and I could leave her uncongenial presence.

Mr. Lee, as in duty bound, accompanied me home to learn how Lionel was, and a wet, windy, and comfortless ride we had through the dark, rugged, winding lanes. Lionel and Geoffrey had not been in many minutes when we arrived, and Lionel seemed surprised and annoyed to see us.

"I am not ill that all this fuss should be made," he said irritably, "and there was no need, Marjorie, for either you or Geoffrey to have come home. I am quite well, but," to Mr. Lee, "not at all disposed for company, so I hope you will excuse me if I go and do a little work in my studio."

"You had better stay here and have a pleasant chat with Mr. Lee," remarked Geoffrey, but Lionel stalked from the room.

"I don't like it," muttered Geoffrey to himself as we listened to Lionel's retreating footsteps, and heard him lock himself into his studio.

"He looks very queer—what's amiss with him?" asked Mr. Lee.

"I don't know," answered Geoffrey shortly.

And then we all drew our chairs round the fire and sat in silence for a little while.

"Living in this place does not suit him for one thing," resumed Geoffrey thoughtfully, "and we must try and persuade him to leave it."

"It is very dull," agreed Mr. Lee with a sigh, "and why a man lives here of his

own free will passes my comprehension. Do you like it, Mrs. Prynne?"

"I hate it!" I said with a nervous shiver.

"And also——" Geoffrey was beginning, when a terrible silence fell upon us all, for clear through the quiet house rang out the sudden, sharp report of a pistol. We gazed into one another's faces with a growing horror and comprehension, for the sound had come from the studio. I tried to rise—I tried to speak, but only a low moan or two escaped me, and then a blessed oblivion came.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN I came to my senses I was lying upon my bed, and Mrs. Lee was sitting beside me, gently bathing my forehead, and one of the servants was moving softly about the room. Memory returned with my senses.

"Oh, tell me it is only a horrible dream, Mrs. Lee!" I sharply cried.

"It is not a dream, Mrs. Prynne," she replied, in her own grim tones, although the touch of her hand upon my head was so gentle, and although she had come at once through the stormy night to me in my extremity.

"Is Lionel—is my husband——?" I could say no more.

"He is dead," said Mrs. Lee.

I closed my eyes; I prayed to die; but no relief came to my overwrought senses now—not even tears.

In a short while Geoffrey entered the room.

"Has she spoken?" he asked Mrs. Lee in a whisper.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Lee.

"Sensibly?"

"Yes; she remembers it all."

Geoffrey took the chair Mrs. Lee vacated, and put his hand gently upon my wrist, and I opened my eyes and looked into his, and his, full of the tenderest pity, looked back into mine, but neither of us spoke one word.

At last he let go my wrist.

"You must keep very quiet," he said gently, "and think as little as possible. Let Mrs. Lee put you to bed; and you must stay there for many days, and leave everything to me."

I obeyed his instructions, for my head felt cold and numb, and I could not think clearly or exercise my will. And thus I was saved much terrible suffering, for Geoffrey and Mr. Lee took everything upon themselves, and I was saved from every

horrible detail of that most horrible time. On one day only I left my room and saw my husband's face for the last time. Oh, very calm and peaceful he looked, with a smile upon his face that had never rested there in life. His death had been instantaneous, for with skilful, unerring aim, he had shot himself through the heart. Shot himself for the sake of one false woman, while my great love had been powerless to cheer or save him!

I was very ill after this; a doctor came from the nearest town every day, and Mrs. Lee nursed me untiringly, but never gave me one word or look of love or sympathy.

Many weeks went on, and then one day I was able to leave my bed and sit up a little in my room. And Geoffrey came to see me. He came to tell me all that had been done; and after we had talked a little while, he put a worn-looking pocket-book into my hands, and there was a round hole right through it.

"Lionel wore it," he said, "and I was obliged to look into it for evidence; but I did not think it necessary to make its contents known."

I opened it with trembling hands, and took from it a photograph. This, like the pocket-book, had a round hole right through it, but it had not touched the pictured face—its beauty was unimpaired, and it smiled at me brightly—the proud, sweet, beautiful face of Lady Chesterville—once Lucy Grey!

"It is not you, Marjorie?" said Geoffrey wistfully.

"No," I answered, "it is not I—it never was, Geoffrey!"

"Can it be true?"

"What does it matter?" I cried in anguish; "it is ended now! But burn it, Geoffrey! Oh, burn that cruel face, and let no one know the evil it has done."

Geoffrey put it into the fire.

"I showed it to Mr. and Mrs. Lee," he said; "I thought it best to do so."

"Oh, you should not——" I began, when I suddenly felt how little anything mattered now; and, for the first time since Lionel's death, I sobbed aloud.

"Oh, Geoffrey," I cried in my desolation, "I think my heart is broken!"

And he sat silent and made no attempt to comfort me. And Mrs. Lee came into the room, and, seeing my tears, very grimly ordered me to bed again.

But, by-and-by, in spite of myself, I grew strong and well, and Mrs. Lee gave up her post of nurse, and went back

to the vicarage; Geoffrey went to the practice he had bought in London, and I lived on alone in my dreary home.

But why need I dwell on these lonely days? I have told the love-story of my youth and its disastrous ending, and that is all I intended to tell. Sometimes, when I remember how great my desolation was, I wonder that comfort could ever have come, or happiness have been mine again. Yet, when I remember how soon and completely the comfort came, and how perfect my happiness is, I wonder that the misery could ever have been so dark and deep. For I am truly happy now, safe under the care of a faithful love in which there is no sadness, no mystery—no Lucy Grey!

A HOLIDAY MYSTERY.

By W. W. FENN.

"COME down and join us; we are a jolly, albeit a domestic party. Myself and wife, her mother, our two boys, and a brother-in-law, Stanwell by name, whom I think you know. The quarters are rather rough, but thoroughly comfortable, quite suited to our life in these wild regions, and we can get you a snug bedroom in the same house. So say you will come, and speedily. There is plenty of fine stuff—the cliffs and rocks are stupendous, quite up to all that one has heard of them both in form and colour, whilst the seascape is grander than can be imagined. Such breakers—even in the calmest weather—I have never beheld; clear green seas as transparent as glass right up to your feet, for the shell sand is so clean that it does not sully the water in the least. We may truly say that we are 'bound in with the triumphant sea, whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege of watery Neptune.'"

This was the paragraph in George Barford's letter which decided me. It was dated from the Lizard, August the 1st, 1882; and George Barford, as may be guessed, is a painter, and an old friend of mine. I was debating where I should spend my month's holiday; Cornwall was new ground to me; the company would be congenial in all respects; there would be rest and quiet without dullness, and I should be able to indulge my propensity for, and my amateurish talent in, sketching. I would go, and I wrote and said so.

The next day I met Ned Dawson, also

a friend of the Barfords, and a fellow infinitely in accord with our common tastes. He volunteered to accompany me, and also wrote and said so. The reply guaranteed him as hearty a welcome as the invitation had offered me, and in the course of a week, we rendered ourselves at the Paddington terminus, booking through to Penrhyn, the nearest point to the Lizard touched by the Great Western Railway. It was the Bank Holiday, which fell in 1882 on Monday the 7th of August, and that evening we found ourselves, a few minutes after eight, swinging along by the mail train towards the far west.

It had been one of the few really hot and sultry days with which we were favoured during that wet and windy summer, and the evening was equally hot and sultry. I am thus circumstantial, because a point in what I am going to relate, besides being strictly true, turns in a measure upon these facts, as will be seen hereafter. That particular journey is so familiar, and so comparatively easy, and so like most other railway journeys nowadays, that it needs no record. It is sufficient that we duly reached Truro at six a.m., quitted the main-line which goes on to Penzance, and got into a carriage on the Falmouth branch. Another hour's run brought us to Penrhyn, that is to say at seven-fifteen, a quarter of an hour late.

Here, just outside the station, ensued the usual scrimmage with baggage, passengers, and mail-bags, which latter, especially, are carried on westward by a ramshackle two-horsed omnibus. There was some delay in getting the cargo on board this inconvenient vehicle. The driver being responsible for time at the post-office, was in a mighty hurry to be off, and would scarcely listen to my protest that our baggage had not been brought out. He was already on his box, with Ned Dawson beside him, I being on the seat behind. We swore we would not go on without our kit, and in order to accelerate its arrival, Ned dismounted, disappeared into the station, and presently reappeared with a porter and a truck containing it. All this, together with the hoisting of the luggage on to the roof, making it fast, etc., caused still further delay, so that not only did the down train, from which we had alighted, proceed on its way to Falmouth, whilst we were still waiting outside the station, but the up morning-mail, from that place for London, ran into the shed, and started again before we did. It passed

out into the pale, watery morning sunlight clear before our eyes, and not a hundred yards distant. It was going in the same direction in which our horses' heads were turned for the time, so that we had a good uninterrupted view of it, as it slowly moved on, and we could see the passengers' faces plainly in several of the carriages.

I had not left the top of the omnibus, and Ned was by this time again in his seat beside the driver. Whilst we were watching the departing train, and were ourselves also just on the point of starting, we both simultaneously and suddenly exclaimed:

"Why, look! There is George Barford himself. Look! he is waving his hands to us! What a funny thing! That's the London train; where can he be going?"

And, certainly, there was George, standing up and leaning out of a carriage-window without his hat, and signalling to us with his arms, as if he had just caught sight of us. Again we exclaimed almost simultaneously, as we too waved our hands in reply:

"Why, what can it mean? He is never going up to town. Surely he expected us to-day; he knew we were coming. Good Heavens! how dangerous it looks; see, see, he seems to be hanging half out of window. He will fall out if he doesn't mind."

I know not exactly which of us uttered these words or their equivalent, but we were so actuated by the same impulse, so mutually scared by the perilous way in which our friend thrust himself out of the carriage in his frantic efforts to attract our attention, that Ned and I both spoke at once, and clutched hold of each other in a kind of agony as we continued watching the figure in the now fast-receding train.

"What an extraordinary thing!" we repeated. "There! you can almost see his knees; he'll fall out to a dead certainty if he doesn't take care."

The next moment a bend in the railroad hid the train from further observation, and our vehicle began to proceed on its journey.

"Well," said I, "something serious must have happened to take him off to-day of all days. He had a dark coat on, clearly as if he were going to London. Could you see if his wife was with him, Ned?"

"No," replied Dawson; "he filled up the whole of the window. I couldn't tell if anyone was in the carriage besides himself. It is very extraordinary."

"Very," I said; "he would never have left on the very day he knew we were coming, except on urgent business. In the letter I had from him yesterday (Monday) morning, he said he would not work to-day, but come and meet us at the place where the omnibus stops at the Lizard village, and that we should be there about twelve."

"Yes, he wrote the same to me," went on Ned; "I can't make it out. Perhaps the old lady or somebody is dead; there must be some grave reason for his going off so suddenly. Besides, he seemed as if he was on the look-out for us just now, and was wanting to explain to us that he was obliged to go."

"Precisely what my impression was," I answered; "he appeared so eager that we should see him, and that we should understand that he saw us, and that he knew we should be puzzled."

"Puzzled, indeed," said Dawson; "I was never so puzzled in my life."

For several minutes we continued interchanging similar expressions of astonishment and speculative remarks as to the cause of this unlooked-for behaviour on the part of our host. We conjured up all sorts of reasons, likely and unlikely, possible and impossible, which could have obliged him to leave so suddenly. A hundred doubts and fears occurred to us, but none led us any nearer the precise truth. Of course, whatever it was it must have been something very unexpected as well as serious which took him away on this particular morning, but beyond this broad conclusion we could not get. Then we began to wonder how he could have started from the Lizard, and reached Falmouth in time to catch the up-train leaving there at seven a.m.

"Perhaps he came to Penrhyn and was actually waiting in the station for his train when we were getting out of ours," suggested Dawson.

"Nay," I replied, "that could hardly be; we should have been sure to see him on the platform; besides, he would have been on the look-out for us, for he knew we were coming by that train. No, he must have started from Falmouth, and he must have gone over there yesterday; he could not have reached there from the Lizard in time this morning."

"But yesterday was the Bank Holiday," said Ned, "when I expect everything was at a standstill in these parts as elsewhere.

I don't believe he could have got over yesterday."

This discovery introduced another element of wonder which we duly debated. Presently I said to the driver:

"How could any one get over to Falmouth from the Lizard yesterday or this morning in time for that up-train?"

"He couldn't ha' done it no how yesterday nor this morning," returned the man curtly, for he had not yet recovered from the delay our luggage had partly caused, and he kept his eyes sulkily fixed on his horses' ears.

"He might have reached Falmouth on Sunday, I suppose?" interposed Dawson.

No reply was vouchsafed to this query.

"Yes, but if he had, Ned," said I, "he would have gone up yesterday morning, and not have waited until to-day, if his business was urgent. Are you quite sure, coachman, there was no way of going from the Lizard to Falmouth yesterday?" I added.

"He might ha' took the excursion steamer back last night, perhaps," replied the man after a sullen pause; "they comes that way back sometimes on holidays in calm weather."

"Then there was an excursion-boat from Falmouth yesterday?" said Ned.

"Yes," answered the driver, "and a rare cargo she had. I see'n scores of her people on the rocks about the Lizard all day yesterday."

Then we concluded that Barford had adopted this course in his extremity, and that consequently, whatever it was, it must have happened yesterday.

For a while our attention was here diverted from the subject by the exciting incident of having a third horse attached, to drag us up the steep hill out of the straggling little town of Penrhyn. Arrived at the top, the wild and desolate scenery which now opened before us and all around, still kept us from immediately reverting to Barford. A less populated and more dreary landscape it would be hard to find. A bleak hilly sort of barren moorland, heather-clad, and boulder-strewn, treeless, rugged, forbidding, with every here and there evidences of deserted mines and quarries, in the shape of ruinous houses or sheds, tall, shattered chimneys and shafts, great wheels and cranes standing gaunt and bare, like misshapen skeletons of giants belonging to an antediluvian epoch. But for the softening influence of the fair, calm, tender-toned sky, studded

with thin, fleecy, misty clouds, and the distant stretches of quiet, pale, greenish-purple sea appearing on all hands, the aspect of this western land would have been weird indeed. Even as it was, it seemed to justify its legendary, superstition-haunted character, and fully bore out the possibility of any and every tradition one has associated with it; but, as a country for a painter—well, it was eminently disappointing. Still, the actual coast, which is, of course, Dick Tinto's stronghold, is not visible so far inland as where the road from Penrhyn to Helstone winds its bleak and lonely way, so my companion and myself forbore passing final judgment on Barford's wisdom in selecting this region for his painting campaign of 1882.

The mention of our friend's name once more brought our talk and thoughts back to his unaccountable departure. The coachman had recovered his temper by degrees, as he recovered his time, and had grown fairly conversational, so that when we were again reverting to Barford, I asked the man if he had not observed the gentleman frantically waving his arms to us as the up-train moved out of Penrhyn Station. "No, he could not say he had, he'd been too busy with his own business to mind the trains or who was in 'em. He only wished they'd keep time better, and not get him into ill-conveniences with the post-office people."

There were no other passengers outside the omnibus besides Ned and myself, except an old countrywoman and her little boy, and I did not think of asking her if she had seen the strangely energetic passenger. Dawson and I had seen him with our own eyes at the same moment. There was no doubt about that, and the fact needed no confirmation, but it was, none the less, still a puzzle to us.

Leaving the high land across which we had been travelling, we began, about half-past eight o'clock, to descend towards the straggling town of Helstone, at the inn in the main street of which we pulled up to breakfast. Ned Dawson devoted himself during that meal to the study of the legend given in the guide-book concerning the manner in which the place had acquired its significant name, and when we again started on our journey at nine-thirty, and, indeed, until nearly the end of it, our references to George Barford were few and far between. Not until after a further two hours' travelling over another long dreary stretch of high land; similar

to the first ten miles, save that it was more cultivated, and divided by low stone walls into a chessboard of ripening cornfields and root-crops, and the lines of white, slate-roofed houses of the Lizard village glittered in the distance under the strengthening sunlight, did we fall to talking again continuously of our friend.

But now, as we approached the solution of the problem which had been puzzling us so long, and we felt ourselves on the eve of learning, perhaps, that some terrible disaster or tragedy had suddenly overtaken the Barford household, our excitement and anxiety grew to fever-heat.

Punctually at three minutes to twelve, we were within sight of the halting-place of the mail-omnibus, as we could tell by the group of idlers waiting to receive us. Of course it was a matter of no surprise that we did not see George Barford amongst the number. We should have been very surprised if we had seen him after what had happened, notwithstanding his promise to meet us at the omnibus-office. But there were his two boys, looking as radiant and jolly as if their sole occupation lay with sand—as, doubtless, it had done during the past month—and this, at least, reassured us. Clearly, no terrible tragedy could have happened.

Making light, therefore, of the affair, we addressed them gaily as "young shavers," and, after hoping all were well at home, I was about to enquire what had taken their father away, when Barford, major, startled us by interposing:

"Oh yes, all very well, except father. He is rather seedy this morning. We left him asleep on the sofa."

Dawson and I looked at each other in blank amazement.

"What! Do you mean to say the governor is here at the Lizard?" was our next query.

"Yes, of course he is," said the boy. "We have been here six weeks, and he has been doing a lot of work, and we have had no end of larks—it's a jolly place."

My companion, who, ever since the beginning of this peculiar experience, seemed to be actuated by precisely the same sensations as myself, was now likewise so literally dumbfounded that we appeared to be incapable of speech, and we went about getting our traps together, and seeing after their conveyance to the lodgings, like men in a dream. I have no recollection of my surroundings until we reached the threshold of the house, where

we were met at the sitting-room door by Mrs. Barford. As she greeted us she added hurriedly, in an undertone, with a finger to her lip, "George hasn't been very well this morning, but don't say anything about it; he is better now." In proof whereof, the man himself came forward with outstretched hands, but looking ghastly pale, and strangely unlike himself. Somehow, we all appeared to be under the influence of a certain awkward constraint. Husband and wife were far from being at their ease, and our surprise kept Dawson and myself, for a moment or two, comparatively tongue-tied.

"I—we hardly—hardly expected to find you here," at length stammered Ned; "in fact—"

"Not find me here?" interrupted Barford with a sickly smile. "What do you mean? Where did you think I was?"

"Well," replied Dawson, "we thought you had gone—gone to London or somewhere else, for we saw you going away from Penrhyn in the train from Falmouth."

"What nonsense—ridiculous, impossible! How could you have seen me there when I am here?" cried Barford rather sharply, and this time without even the semblance of a smile.

"Well, then, it was your wraith, for I never saw any two people so alike in this world. Did you?" added Dawson, appealing to me.

"Never," I acquiesced; "it was most extraordinary."

"Wraith, wraith!" said Barford petulantly. "I don't know what you mean;" and then after a pause, and with a faint return of the sickly smile: "You fellows seem to have taken leave of your wits. But there, I am very glad to see you are all right. Did you have a pleasant journey?"

He said this with such an evident desire to turn the conversation, that for a while we dropped the subject, and passed on to ordinary topics, although still with some constraint. It was impossible, however, altogether to avoid speaking again, more than once, of the curious manner in which we had been deceived by the figure in the train at Penrhyn. But whenever we did so, both husband and wife became uneasy, and immediately talked of other things. Remembering Mrs. Barford's wish, we made little or no reference to her husband's indisposition, but presently I said:

"You have not been at work then to-day, George? It was a splendid morning, though

rather chilly at first, but it's warming up now. Don't let us waste your time."

"Oh, no, no!" he answered languidly as he again stretched himself on the sofa. "I shall not go out now till after dinner. I have been rather out of sorts this morning. I had a dip in the briny, and I think it rather upset me."

A significant glance from his wife prevented both Dawson and myself from pursuing this subject, and continuing to feel conscious that we had somehow arrived at an inopportune moment, and that there was an atmosphere of mystery hanging about, we rose, and suggested that the boys should show us our rooms.

Passing into the passage, we encountered Mr. Stanwell, whom we both slightly knew, and who, as Barford had said, formed one of his party. Laden with his sketching apparatus, he was returning to the mid-day meal, and after greeting us, followed us upstairs. He looked a little preoccupied, and when we had exchanged a few words, came into our room, saying:

"I am very glad you have come, for to tell you the truth, I have had a terrible fright this morning about poor Barford. Did they tell you about it?"

"No," I answered; "Mrs. Barford and George both seemed very strange and uncomfortable, and only made a passing reference to his being unwell. What was the matter?"

The boys had gone downstairs again, and Stanwell, closing the door with an air of mystery, began his account of what had been going on as follows:

"It was a lovely morning," he said, "and at six o'clock I routed up Barford and the two boys, and proposed that we should go down to the Cove and have a dip. Our walk lay through barley-fields heavy with dew, and down a narrow gorge, ending in a zig-zag sort of apology for a path, over and among huge granite boulders, on to the sandy shore then left clear by the ebb. We were soon all careering amongst the big breakers, which always come tumbling in round the Lizard Point as the tide flows. The boys had enough of it very soon, being too small to stand much knocking about from such waves, and they were nearly dressed, when their father followed them out of the water, and began his toilet. I, being the best swimmer, could not refrain from having another plunge, but had not turned my face seaward for more than a minute or two, before I heard a peculiar noise

as of heavy groaning proceeding from the shore. Instantly looking back, I saw that Barford had fallen forward, face downwards, from the rock where his clothes were lying, and was struggling and writhing on the smooth patch of sand. I rushed to him as quickly as possible, and placing him on his back, raised his head a little with my arm. He was violently convulsed, and his face became purple. I immediately began rubbing the region of his heart with sand, and used all the means I could think of to restore him. In a short time he opened his eyes, and then as suddenly was seized with another and similar convulsive fit. I hastened to slip on my flannel shirt, and to secure both our friend and his clothes from the fast-advancing tide. The boys were now dressed, and looking on in a greatly excited state. I dispatched them at once to the house, which was nearly a mile off, telling them to break the news that their father was ill to their mother, as gently as possible, and to bring her down with some brandy, and such restoratives as she might possess. Then, having hurriedly huddled on some more garments, I repeated the operation of rubbing the heart and body, and after a somewhat longer period, life seemed gradually to be restored. I say life, because for a time there seemed little left; in fact, for several minutes I thought he was dead."

"What time was this, do you think?" asked Dawson, interrupting the narrator.

"Just about half-past seven," answered Stanwell; "I happened to look at my watch as I was putting it into my pocket a moment before."

"The very hour," I muttered to Dawson. He nodded significantly, as Stanwell proceeded:

"After a period of the greatest anxiety I have ever experienced, I at last saw, to my infinite relief, Mrs. Barford and the boys hurrying down the steep path through the ravine, and by the time they reached me, I was thankful to have the poor sufferer in a more presentable state than he had been in hitherto. We proceeded to complete his dressing as well as we could, and to administer brandy, and in a little while began lifting and half carrying him up over the rocks.

"The sun by this time had risen considerably, and was beating down fiercely upon our backs as we ascended the gorge, adding not a little to the difficulty of our task. Happily for all, the patient now

rapidly gained strength, and assisted us by endeavouring to walk a little, although he did not appear capable of saying more than a muttered word now and then. At length, when we reached the heathery top of the cliffs, and we all sat down pretty well exhausted, we felt most thankful that we had got so far, at least, safely. By degrees, and after a further toilsome walk, we eventually reached home, and here, putting our poor friend upon the sofa, we were gratified by seeing him fall into a quiet sleep."

As Mr. Stanwell paused, Dawson and I looked at each other, and we then rapidly told him what had happened to us at that precise hour. His astonishment was no less than ours.

"Most remarkable indeed," he said curtly; "a most remarkable coincidence."

Remarkable coincidence indeed!—that seemed no word for it to us. Finally, after much confabulation, before going downstairs, we all three determined that, at any rate for the present, we had better say nothing more about our strange experience to Mr. and Mrs. Barford. It would be better to pass it over, together with his illness, in silence. Evidently they did not like to have it referred to, and as he very speedily appeared to be pretty well himself again, we refrained, as far as possible, from reverting to the matter. We often longed to ask him what his sensations were at the moment he was attacked, and whether any thought of us two journeying down towards him then crossed his mind. Once or twice, as I have hinted, during our stay at the Lizard, we approached the subject with this end, but he always displayed such an uneasy dislike to it, and so immediately changed the conversation, that we were forced to respect his prejudice, and have never directly spoken again about our perplexity and its cause. It would have been but natural, perhaps—it certainly would have advanced the story a stage—if we had been told that a momentary vision of us had presented itself to him at that critical moment; but knowing the man as I do—how utterly unimaginative and matter-of-fact he is—I am of opinion that he never gave us a thought. Yet if this was so, why should he have been so indignant with us for speaking of his wraith, and have accused us pettishly of having taken leave of our wits? It is all past comprehension, and throughout our month's sojourn at the Lizard, none of us appeared thoroughly at our ease; but, on the whole,

we had a pleasant time, and all returned to London together, without anything more occurring worthy of mention.

Here then is the story as far as it goes, absolutely true in all respects save in the names of the parties concerned. What is to be made of it? It is vouched for by unimpeachable witnesses. The writer and his friend, Mr. Dawson, are gentlemen of the highest integrity, and, like Barford, are straightforward, clear-sighted, clear-thinking, rational beings, with plenty of common-sense, and inclined to look at everything from a matter-of-fact point of view rather than from the romantic, sentimental, or imaginative. Their impressions are identical in this case, and we have two pairs of eyes simultaneously impressed in the same way by the same object. Could they both have been deceived? Could they both at the same moment have jumped to one conclusion as to the identity of the figure in the carriage, unless it had been such as would have convinced a dozen pairs of eyes that they were looking on Mr. Barford? Any number of persons, one may suppose, might have seen what they saw, and would have argued as they did, under the same circumstances. There was no particular tie or unusual bond of friendship between them and Barford to account for it on the principle of the Corsican Brothers,—that typical story of premonition and warning. What then is to be made of it all? Nothing more has come of it. Mr. Barford soon recovered, and is now apparently in as good health as he ever was; but had he died, it would hardly have strengthened or increased the strangeness of the circumstance. It certainly would not have altered it, for there can be little doubt but that for a while his life did hang in the balance. Was it during that little while that his released, or partially released, spirit was capable of reproducing his bodily presentment and impressing it on the optic nerves of his two friends? The time corresponded precisely, as testified by Mr. Stanwell. But then, why should that bodily presentment have been reproduced to them in the railway-carriage, so that it gave the idea of his going away to London? Why should it not have appeared on the road—in the omnibus—anywhere? Or was the whole affair one of mere coincidence, after all—the person in the railway-carriage merely accidentally closely

resembling Barford, and that person, further, mistaking the two gentlemen seated on the omnibus for friends of his own? If this be the true solution, surely it makes it but little less strange. By some, such stories will always be laughed at; by others, they will be considered to be fraught with the gravest importance and consequences. One thing only remains pretty certain, they will ever appeal to that vein of superstition ineradicable from, and inherent in, human nature, and in this way they will always afford valuable stock-in-trade to the story-teller and writer of imaginative fiction. In this capacity it is that I have become possessed of the above manuscript.

TOLD IN FLANDERS.

MAY, 1660.

By S. K. PHILLIPS.

WHAT! they have called the Stuart back again,
To put the yoke upon the necks we freed!
And all the blood that watered English fields
Was spilt for naught—well, I nor know nor heed.

Mine is no single story of life spoilt,
And hope laid waste, for either cause or king;
Or Charles, or Cromwell—one might laugh, one frown,
But either held a heart a useless thing!

The Stuart back again! and but for her,
He might be lying still enow I wot;
And round the head they crown the earth-worm's trail,

And in the heart they trust my errant shot.
Dost know the tale? How one October eve,
I, with my troop, was close upon his track,
This man, this king—how the old war-cry calls,
The fiery past and all its memories back!

Well, listen, boy, and gather from my lot,
Lessons, the first girl that you meet will scatter
To the four winds—for you will dree your weird,
And spend your best for love—'tis no great matter!

Aye—we were camping out by Droitwich town,
And tidings came Charles Stuart lay concealed,
In Hindley Castle, a malignant Hold,
Whose master led his band to Worcester field.

Some chance had spared his head, and still he kept,
A sorry state in that grey tower of his—
My Mabel's father—mine—whose rosy lips
Erewhile had met mine in betrothal kiss;
Then civil war had struck our hands apart,
Though love held fast, albeit sorely tried;
She prized the white rose that she proudly wore,
And duty held me close to Cromwell's side.

Well, a scout beat my quarters up that day—
My curse upon him and his lying tongue!
And said, at nightfall—'twas a likely tale
For the sky lowered, and the moon was young—
Charles Stuart from the postern-gate would pass,
On Mabel's palfrey white, in woman's weed,
While in the forest trusty posts were set,
On to the seaboard, safe his flight to speed.

I knew the postern—our old tryst was there—
I knew the palfrey I was wont to guide,
Through many a happy idle summer noon,
In the great forest, down the grassy ride;
And with ambitious pulses throbbing high,
I laid my ambush, planned the sure surprise,
And thought how I could buy her father's grace,
And win my darling with my royal prize.

You see I deemed my Mabel far away,
Close in her convent walls, in sunny France,
So set my spring in peace, and would not fear
Of doom from her quick lip or angry glance;
I knew her father, crippled limb and purse
At Worcester fight, his threshold might not cross,
And thought to strike my stroke and win my
game,
And in my triumph heal both wrath and loss.

She would forgive, for love will pardon all
Done for love's sake, and we'd entreat him well.
How slow they lagged away, the weary hours!
How slow the shades of night around us fell!
As in the thicket with my troopers round,
With hungry eyes we watched the winding road;
The pheasant's whirring wing our pulses thrilled;
The hare's shy footfall echoed as it trode.

At last, at last, through the dim shadows loomed,
The woman's figure, and the snow-white horse;
"Stand, or we shoot!" clear rang the challenge
out,

We saw him start, yet hold upon his course;
Once more the warning—reckless on he pressed,
Urging with whip and spur the desperate flight,
And then, the sharp ring of my pistol woke
The thousand echoes of the forest night!

He staggered, reeled, and from the saddle fell,
And bursting through the brushwood with a shout,
We rushed to seize him, just as from the clouds
With a wild ghastly gleam the moon looked out.
Him! On no swarthy Stuart locks and brows,
Glared that wild light. The iron soldiers round
Would shudder, telling of the cry I gave,
Falling, as death-struck, by Her, on the ground.

My darling, my lost darling! nine long years
Have wearied by me since that night accurst,
Yet as I tell it, the old anguish wakes,
And throbs and burns as fiercely as at first.
My darling, with my bullet in her side,
Who looked up at me with such pitying eyes,
As my stunned senses woke to agony,
On the stained turf, beneath the cruel skies.

She whispered, with the ghost of the old smile,
At the old jest, "For you, and for the king!"
She laid my hand upon her bleeding breast,
And there, and there, oh, God!—I felt my ring!
Murmured some fluttering words of love and faith
To hush the ravings of my mad despair,
And drew me to her for a last, long kiss,
And then she went, and left me lonely there.

What chanced the next? I scarcely know or care.
They said my fatal shot a warning gave,
My troopers found the lair—the prey was flown;
So not in vain my love had died to save.
'Twas on that loyal errand she was bound,
The blundering spy had hit but half the truth;
So in the great State whirlpool sank the bark,
That held the golden promise of our youth.

I would not tread the path her blood had dyed,
Flung my commission back in Cromwell's face,
And while brows bent and hilts were clutched
around,

I broke my sword across, and left the place;
Over the seas I found a refuge here
Where men had scarcely heard an English name,
And tidings from the land that held her grave,
To stir my sullen memory rarely came.

Love, is my penance almost over now?
Is the wrong cancelled, and the hand washed
white?

Will the gray hairs and weary lines of pain,
Change in the radiance of the heavenly light?
Do priests speak sooth? and shall we meet again,
Happy, and young, and trusting? meet, we two,
Just as we did on the sweet summer eves,
In the green forest, where—I murdered you?

By God's good grace we may—how long—how long!
And war, and woe, and states, and laws, and kings,
And all the stir we make about them here,
Will show to us as very little things.
Only I'm tired—something snapped I think,
Just as I fired that pistol, in my brain;
I'll try and sleep, one should not wake the past.
And so—they've got Charles Stuart back again!

THE SAILING OF THE PSAMATHE.

A ROMANCE OF 1881.

By PAUL CHALLINOR.

CHAPTER I.

"YOU are the very man we want," said
Milner.

"Because I hate the sea with more than
classic hatred, don't know one end of a yacht
from another, or the name of a single rope
or spar, and inevitably get in the way and
give occasion for wrath whenever anything
critical has to be done to a sail?" I
enquired with gentle satire.

"Only for a fortnight," Milner pleaded.

"Don't I know what that means on
board a sailing yacht! Didn't I start
once from Cowes for the Hebrides, take
six weeks getting round the Land's End,
and come home ignominiously by train
from Bristol at last? If you must take
me to Scotland, why not invite me to
a Pullman car? I should know then
exactly how much suffering to expect."

Milner looked cast down.

"Well, Everett, if you won't come, you
won't. I knew you were the laziest beggar
living, but lying about a deck reading
novels in the sunshine is the extent of the
exertion required of you—you needn't even
talk, there'll be plenty to do that without
you—and if you don't feel equal to it, I
have no more to say. I didn't think it
was much use asking you, somehow. Nora
settled it."

"My dear fellow, why couldn't you have
said so at first? If Mrs. Milner gives an
order, I know it's for my good, even
though its wisdom be not apparent to my
limited vision, and forthwith obey with
simple, unquestioning faith. When do we
start?"

"Next Tuesday. But you are to dine

with us to-morrow, to talk over matters and meet Desmond Heron."

"The Irish M.P.—the Home Ruler? Is he of your party?" I groaned.

"Of course he is. If you had listened to a single word I have been saying, you would have heard that the cruise is undertaken solely on his account. He has been ordered by the doctors to strike work for some time, and above all to keep clear of the House—not an easy order to obey just now. Poor fellow! he has had a good deal to try him."

"Didn't Kilmainham agree with him?" I asked innocently.

"Don't be such an idiot, Everett. The Queen has not a more loyal subject than Heron. Kilmainham!"

"I beg your pardon," I said humbly. "The last time I read a speech of his he seemed on the road there—that was all."

"He has stood by his party like a man, and gone as far with them as he could with honour, and they have rewarded him as is the nature of the animal to do. But remember, not a word of Ireland to-morrow, or of politics of any description, if you can help it. Don't forget. To-morrow, Wednesday, the 27th. Can you undertake to recollect so much?"

"On my head be it. Eight o'clock, I suppose?"

I did remember, and was more than punctual. Eight had not struck by the "grandfather's clock" on Milner's staircase when I entered the pretty drawing-room in Cromwell Road. It was perfect in its way, like its mistress, charming according to no particular rules of art, but bright, quaint, altogether satisfying, full of traces of a thousand whims and fancies indulged to the full, as they well may be by a young couple happy in the possession of a full purse and empty nursery. I sighed to think for what all this was going to be exchanged: for one room the size of an inferior butler's pantry, a deck scorching or slippery as the case might be, the chances of wind and wave, and deliberate exile from half the comforts of everyday life.

Mrs. Milner, unconscious of my presence, was idling gracefully about the room, a slim, girlish figure in golden-brown draperies, touching her pretty possessions as if she loved them, adjusting an artistic arrangement of dandelions and dock-leaves in a brown kitchen-pot, turning the easel with Milner's last acquisition in water-colours a trifle more to the light, redraping the folds of a brocade portière. I came up just as

she was lightly touching the white shoulders of a marble nymph with a peacock plume.

"You dirty girl," I heard her say.

"And you will leave her for weeks and weeks to the mercy of housemaids," I murmured reproachfully.

She turned round on me laughing merrily. She always was laughing, except when she was talking, or eating, or drinking. I never in my life saw Mrs. Milner working, or reading, or listening, and can't imagine her asleep.

"It will do her no harm to wear her holland pinafore for a month. So you are coming? Walter was really pleased when you accepted, under protest. You see, we particularly want a pleasant party, for poor Desmond Heron's sake."

"Why 'poor,' and what can I do to comfort an Obstructionist?"

"A heartbroken man!" she said softly, sinking into a chair. "Don't you know he was shot at the last time he went down to his own home? He, who always believed that, come what might, his people would stand by him! The disappointment is crushing him. Then he has been denounced as a traitor by his party, because he supports Government on the Land Question. Yes, I know how infinitely absurd it must appear to you for a man to be affected by anything not relating to his own personal welfare, and to distress himself because a few thousand of his fellow-creatures are letting themselves be led blindly to their own destruction, but some men are so constituted, and Desmond Heron is one. Love of his country is the one passion of his life, I believe."

"Unrequited, it appears," I gently suggested.

Mrs. Milner gave me a scornful look, as she well knows how to do. She is a happy, innocent-faced creature, as full of play as a kitten, and as ready to scratch on occasion. I adore her, and she knows it, and Milner knows it, and we are none of us any the worse for the fact. I gave in, and hastily petitioned for details.

"You should hear Walter tell Desmond Heron's story," she said, "and of his first visit to Corrig Diarmid. Desmond had just come into the property unexpectedly, by the death of a distant cousin. He didn't want it, a young officer in a crack regiment with a handsome income of his own; but he was Irish, and patriot above all, and started to take possession in high glee, little thinking what awaited him, poor fellow! It was the famine year,

and Walter says their journey to the west haunts him still like a bad dream. The last man had been an absentee, and no one in Dublin had been able to tell them anything about the place. They found their way to it through awful scenes of desolation; through wide green valleys, with great, solemn hills around rising to the sky, and not a human voice or sound to break the silence, only the scream of the wild-fowl, until once, as they passed a cluster of ruined-looking smokeless hovels, he heard, for the first time, the 'keen' over the dead. 'But it's past keening they are, the craturs,' said the driver. 'Not a decent burying, let alone a wake, since Father Moriarty was down.' Dead and dying everywhere, all the young and strong gone to seek their fortunes abroad. It was terrible. When they got to the shut-up, dilapidated old house, they found the news of their coming had somehow got wind, and there was a little crowd to welcome them. Poor, starved tatterdemalions! They crowded round the car, and tried a feeble little shout of 'Long life to the young master!' 'Long life to reign over us!' And then, Walter says, Desmond fairly broke down, and cried like a child. He grew years older in those days, and rose to the work that lay before him like a man; but he had the evils of three generations to undo. He sold every acre he had in England, and gave himself and his to his Irish people. I saw nothing of the place till five years ago, when we spent our honeymoon there. Such a lovely spot, like a scene in a romance, with Desmond and his wife for hero and heroine!"

"He is married?"

"She died soon after our visit. She was the only descendant of the old family. There was a poetical fitness in the marriage, you see; and a perfect wife she was—a typical Irish beauty, witty and winning beyond all English imagining, and devoted heart and soul to her husband's work. He was almost indignant at the extent of her personal influence with the people. When they had driven him past all patience by obstinately persisting in some pernicious old practice, or by refusing even to try some new labour-saving device, all at once they would give in, "to oblige the mistress"—an utterly wrong principle. Not a bit of the place was like an English model farm; nothing half so hideous; but the farmhouses were comfortable, some handsome, and the labourers' cottages tidy and cosy. There were schools, with

rosy, barefooted children trotting in and out; and at the chapel on Sundays as well-to-do-looking a congregation as you could meet anywhere. Poor Aileen! she was like a young queen among them; and they broke her heart at last! Hush! Why, Walter, how late you are! And where can Desmond Heron be?"

I was interested in the man by this time, though predisposed to detest him. Didn't she call him "Desmond," while I am always "Mr. Everett"?

Here he was at last. Quite an old foggy, grey-haired and bright-eyed, with an arm in a sling; a tall, rather bent figure, and a singularly soft, sweet voice. Inoffensive, at any rate. And here was dinner.

We were a gay little party. The Milners' new yacht, their pet and plaything, the Psamathe, of course engrossed the conversation. Her rig, her behaviour generally, her stores, were all exhaustively discussed, and the three weeks at Walter's disposal were to include more than the mind of yachtsman had ever conceived. The original scheme, to which we eventually reverted, was to sail up the east coast as far as we could for a week, and then—weather permitting—return as we came.

"Don't leave Ernescliffe out," said Mrs. Milner. "Remember I shall want a whole day with Madge, and you all may go fishing the while."

Madge was Mrs. Milner's elder sister, married to a Yorkshire vicar, whom we were to visit in passing.

Heron talked little and ate less. He brightened up whenever Mrs. Milner addressed him, but sank again directly into moody silence.

When she left the room, he turned to Milner, saying very gently:

"Will you and your wife forgive me, Milner, if I beg you to leave me out of this?"

"Why, what's the matter? Your hand isn't worse?" asked Milner anxiously.

"On the contrary, I am to be allowed to use it a little in a few days. It's not that; but being better, I ought to be in my place."

"The Bill will have gone up to the Lords by that time," returned Milner; "and what good will you be doing in the House? I'll promise to get papers at Yarmouth, Scarborough—anywhere we can, all the way—and if you're wanted, which you won't be, you can get back by train. Now, on your honour, are you not under

orders to try a cruise to the South Sea Islands, as the only way of refitting!"

"Something of the sort; but life's too short to waste in the experiment."

"I'll tell you what it is, Heron. If you won't behave with ordinary common-sense, you'll break down utterly. Your nerves are going, and your brain will go after them. Rather costly sacrifices in the interests of your precious countrymen. They'll be the death of you yet."

"They will," said Heron in an emphatic undertone. "And let them, and welcome!" he flashed out suddenly. "They have taken from me all that I lived for—my home, my wife, my belief in the future of my country—all gone! I gave them the best I had in my life, and they drive me from them now, a crippled pauper!" And he brought his left hand down with a force that made Milner's Venetian glass ring, and then covered his eyes for a moment with it.

I objected strongly to such a public display of feeling, but when, as if in extenuation, he tossed a dirty little note over to me, saying, "That came to me at the House this morning," I felt somewhat hot and indignant as I read.

"To the Tyrant of Corrig Diarmid!" it ran. "Tyrants beware! Remember Leitrim and Mountmorres! You've had your warning. Send Sinclair back where he came from, or——"

It was too hideously foul to repeat in full.

"Sinclair is my agent," he explained; "an honest fellow, who won't be terrified out of the country. I must stand by him at all risk; but, Milner," his voice dropped and quivered, "do you know when I was shot at, my servant, who was with me, would not stir a step in pursuit of the man. I followed him as far as I could, and then just managed to creep to one of my own labourers' cottages, and the wife would hardly admit me!"

"The blackguards!" growled Milner. "All the more reason for getting away from them."

Heron shook his head.

"I'm a doomed man, Milner. I feel it. Keep from me, if you love me, as if I were plague-smitten! Let this be our parting."

"Do you think we daren't stand by a friend in trouble!" said an indignant voice from the door. "Do you think we're Irish conspirators?" and Mrs. Milner, in a pretty little flash of generous wrath, laid

her hand protectingly on Heron's shoulder. "Give me this fortnight, it is all I ask, and then we part, if you will, for ever."

He took the pretty fingers and kissed them with infinite tenderness and chivalry, and gave in, as I always did, and everyone else too.

Gravesend, in a bright little gleam of sunshine at high tide, is an exhilarating sight. I felt almost reconciled to my doom as I watched the Psamathe dancing at her moorings from the window of the Falcon, where we four had just dined. Milner and Heron were going to and fro, transporting their possessions on board. Mine had been duly stowed away, and I was left to take charge of Mrs. Milner and an enormous hamper of flowers which Heron had brought down, and which she insisted on repacking on a plan of her own for preservation for an indefinite number of days.

"More moss, if you please, and damper. Thanks, these buds needn't blow for a week to come. You little country beauties, how I love you! Apropos, do you know Venetia Dennistoun?"

"Apropos of rosebuds, do you ask?" I replied. "I suppose, in common with some hundreds of my fellow-countrymen, I am pretty well acquainted with the young lady."

"Now, that speech is meant for a veiled sneer, and I am not sharp enough to find it out," mused Mrs. Milner. "I was thinking of country beauties, everything fresh and sweet. Please explain."

"Well, when one knows how a girl looks in a swing, drinking tea, cuddling a kitten, making eyes at society over a big muff, or swinging her legs perched on a table-corner, and reads once a week what she has been wearing wherever she went, with whom she has ridden, danced, flirted, one may say that one knows her—slightly."

I stopped. Mrs. Milner was in real anger.

"Do you happen to know in addition to all this that she is my most intimate friend, and is to join us this evening—and that the greater part of what you have been saying is—is——"

"Lies, I suppose," I suggested humbly; "but, you see, I believed them. I am very sorry; what can I say to make you forgive me?"

"Just suspend your prejudices one fortnight—no, a week, a day, an hour! That is all I ask; but first admit that you

never, in a photograph or out, saw Venetia looking anything but a lady."

"N—no, perhaps I haven't; but one sees her exhibited amongst the goodly company of professional beauties, and hasn't time to discriminate amongst their various ways and manners."

"I know Venetia's portrait has been everywhere. It's too lovely to suppress, and she can't help those society papers romancing about her doings. I met her last night and told her our plans. She asked if we wouldn't take her in. She is invited to some place in Scotland for August. I couldn't refuse her, even to oblige you."

I hadn't time to reply, for, turning round, I saw standing near us a young lady very quietly dressed, with a big, shady hat, and the sweetest face I ever beheld looking from under it; and I could not help thinking that she must have heard a good deal of our conversation.

I was glad to bury myself in the hamper during the greeting that ensued; but though Mrs. Milner's blue eyes danced with mischief as she introduced us, Miss Dennistoun's face was impenetrable in its gracious calm. Happily the Psamathe's gig appeared nearing the shore. The hamper was finished in a scramble; wraps, books, and small packages collected, and in a few minutes more we were on board. I made myself as useful as a land-lubber could during the transit, being honestly anxious to earn my pardon; but Miss Dennistoun received all my attentions with exactly the same sweet civility that she bestowed on the steward, and left me in doubt whether, after all, she did not consider my opinion of her of exactly as much importance as his.

The Psamathe looked "a picture" that evening, Mrs. Milner said. I suppose she did, but I modestly refrain from attempting to describe it. Miss Dennistoun was equal to the occasion, and admired and criticised with a zest and knowledge of things nautical that bewitched Milner completely.

"A big, bouncing, chattering, brainless school-girl," was my mental verdict.

Handsome she was. Handsome enough to take one's breath away, even in these days of beautiful women, with a tall, strong, graceful figure, and the bearing of a young princess. I understood Mrs. Milner's wrath at my confounding her with the ordinary professional beauty. At her most audacious she looked like royalty on a frolic, dignified in spite of herself.

So we glided swiftly past the low-lying green shores to the sea, through the lingering sunlight.

"A fair beginning," said Mrs. Milner to me; "will it last, I wonder?"

So did I.

I awoke next morning brimful of good resolutions. I was going to be as nautically jolly as I knew how; I would fall in love with Miss Dennistoun as madly and hopelessly as she could require; and I wouldn't mention Liverpool or dynamite in the Home Ruler's hearing as, impelled by some cruel fatality, I did whenever I was short of small-talk. A yachting romance by a master of the subject lay ready to my hand, and there in the cold, grey, morning hours did I conscientiously strive to get myself into the appropriate frame of mind for the situation.

When I got on deck I found a day to try one's philosophy to the full. Soft, steady rain was falling, a dim mist drifting about us, cutting off all sight of the shore, or of anything but a few square yards of murky water, dimpled by falling drops. Miss Dennistoun, looking bigger and handsomer than ever in a white mackintosh, and Milner, were on deck. Heron followed me, excusing his late appearance by explaining that this was his first attempt at dressing without a servant, and exulting in his success. He felt quite happy, he declared, to think how completely his one-handedness exonerated him from any obligation to bear a hand in anything, pulling, or hauling, or belaying, or splicing the mainbrace, or shivering his timbers, or any other nautical manoeuvres.

Breakfast and Mrs. Milner awaited us, after which Milner carried me off to unpack and arrange certain stores. This accomplished, we joined the rest. Weather the same as before, and everyone rather astonished to find it only eleven o'clock. However, we were persistently cheery, and luncheon came at last. After luncheon—a blank. Some wind sprang up, I don't know from what quarter, but it served to amuse Milner. Heron had letters to write, to be posted at Yarmouth, and Mrs. Milner insisted on acting as his secretary. Miss Dennistoun and I were left in possession of the deck.

"Smoke if you like," she said coolly, "I want to read. It's a pity to expend conversation; we shall want it all before we see land."

"By all means," I replied, and withdrew from the neighbourhood of the umbrella,

thinking that good resolution Number Two might as well go overboard.

I couldn't help looking at her now and then, she made such a pretty bit of colour against the dark umbrella, with her knot of red-brown hair, soft pink cheeks, and long, dusky eyelashes slanting downwards. I was glad to see that the book evidently bored her immensely. She tried again at a page, looked back to the last one, then on to the end of the volume, then gave it up and glanced at me, and then looked straight out to sea again into the haze. I began to pace the deck, stopping with ostentatious caution just short of her seat. Backwards and forwards I went, with eyes carefully averted, wondering how long Heron could have the assurance to keep Mrs. Milner immersed in his correspondence. I think half an hour passed in this amusement, and then I took a surreptitious peep under the umbrella. Miss Dennistoun's head had fallen against the taffrail; she was fast asleep. I took a mean revenge for all snubs, for I descended and procured a big Shetland wrap, which I dropped lightly over her, and then securing the umbrella, which was struggling from her grasp, sat down and awaited events. I looked at her once or twice, and was struck by the extreme youthfulness of her face. She was dreaming evidently, and unhappily, for her lips curved like a grieved child's, and presently the soft, curly lashes grew wet with more than spray, and a big tear rolled over the Shetland wrap, and splashed down on to my ungloved hand. I sat looking at it in comical amaze, not caring to brush it off somehow; till I found her eyes wide open, fixed on me.

"Have I been crying?" she asked.
 "And—and—who put this over me?"

Our eyes met, and we broke into a hearty laugh, infinitely cheering and invigorating in the grey gloom.

"Why didn't you come and talk to me, and keep me awake?"

"Because I thought you wanted me, and I might never again get such a chance of disobliging you."

Then we laughed again, but she seemed cramped and chilly, so I descended in search of tea, bringing back the information that Heron and his private secretary "weren't half through their work."

"How mean and despicable to keep us out of the cabin this wretched day," said Miss Dennistoun discontentedly. "I'm sure I could have written those letters for him in half the time."

We took to walking the deck smartly.

"Three o'clock," I observed presently.

"You needn't mention it," was the reply. Up and down, up and down. Miss Dennistoun's fine flow of spirits seemed in abeyance. "Your watch must have stopped," she observed presently.

"Three fifteen exactly," I returned.

Then we both sat down and gazed at the cabin skylight, in which, to complete our disgust, a light now glowed.

"I hope Heron's speech on the Amendments is getting on prosperously," I observed viciously.

"A precious lot of help Nora Milner will be able to give him," said the fair Venetia spitefully.

Silence, and another turn or two.

"Where are we now?"

"Off the coast of Holland, I should imagine," I replied cheerfully. "I don't know, and I don't suppose anyone else does—least of all Milner."

Silence again, and a surreptitious glance at my watch. Three forty-five! Up and down, up and down. It was a trifle lighter now, and the rain stopped by degrees.

"The rain ceased, the decks dried, the air became full of warmth and colour, and the shore broke out in all sorts of atmospheric effects," said Miss Dennistoun, evidently quoting from memory. "What impostors yachting novelists are. I should like to review some of them."

"Perhaps we shall find all that in Scotland," I suggested.

"Scotland! Do you think we shall ever see Scarborough?—I don't."

"Miss Dennistoun, why did you come?"

"Mr. Everett, why did you?"

"I? I'm a pressed man, but you're a volunteer."

"Well, I suppose I was led away by these deluders," she said, extracting a volume from each pocket; "I thought some of it must be true."

I recognised the author whom I had been blindly consulting as an oracle that very morning.

"But," I hazarded, "you know you ought to sing—no, hum songs all day; not beginnings or ends—only middles."

"And you," she retorted, "ought to tell anecdotes; they needn't be new, you know. No one remembers last year's Punch."

"Wait till we get to Scotland," we remarked simultaneously.

"Why, it's past four," I added jovially.

Some thrilling moments followed. Milner

appeared, shouting, "Nora! Heron! Mick! Look out!" Up they rushed, and we too.

"The Leith steamer! Over there!" and we all contemplated with wild excitement a big, splashing monster that took shape for a brief moment, and then became one with the mist again. "And they'll be at their journey's end on Friday," I sighed.

Next day rose fair and bright, the perfection of yachting weather; a calm sea and a fair wind. Heron's speech, or whatever it was, being happily disposed of, Mrs. Milner was free to make herself charming in other quarters, and he looked absolutely gay and careless, lying on the deck reading Tennyson to Miss Dennistoun, who had appeared in a striking and distractingly becoming get-up of white serge and red stockings and fisher-cap.

We reached Yarmouth that afternoon, and sent a boat off for letters and papers. Heron sent his share, when it reached him, away, "not to spoil a holiday," but Milner and I threw ourselves with avidity on the newspapers, and Miss Dennistoun sat on the deck, and opened envelope after envelope, till she was fairly snowed-up in a heap of invitation-notes and At Home cards.

"What a foolish girl you were to give up all this, Venetia," said Mrs. Milner. "Aren't you sorry you came?"

Miss Dennistoun looked up, smiling brightly.

"Sorry! Do you think I ever want to see another London season? I'm glad to have had my day, but, oh, so much more glad that it's done!"

"Bless the girl! what next?"

"A sisterhood, maybe. I've thought of that often, unless I can do better. Heigho!" she ended with a sigh that set me pondering.

A calm, bright evening. The future "sister" appeared gorgeous in Venetian brocade and velvet at dinner. We ordered coffee on deck, but, before joining the ladies, Heron opened his parcel of letters. He gave an impatient half-laugh, half-sigh, as he turned them over and spread them out on the table.

"Look at them, Milner—Everett. Aren't they just heartbreaking? Sinclair, my agent, writes that he is boycotted, of course, and has had threatening letters sent him. A shot was fired at Mrs. Sinclair through the dairy-window, but he

thinks that was only done to terrify them. Peter Mahon, the old herdsman, has been badly beaten, and lies in a critical state, for driving Mr. Sinclair's cows to market. Poor old Peter! I must get back, Milner. Listen! 'The Floyds have had their ricks fired, and the Learys' team were driven into the lake and drowned. None of the following have paid rent, alleging that their lives wouldn't be safe for an hour if they dared'—a shabby excuse, nothing more—and a notice has been stuck up, calling upon all honest men to rise against landlordism, and to begin with the traitor, Desmond Heron.' Here's something politer—a notice from the Land League, calling on me to evict at once Denis Conran, and reinstate the sons of Mary O'Shea in their holding. Their father died two years ago, leaving three years' rent unpaid, and his land gone to the bad. I let the widow and her sons take what they could away with them, and paid their passage to America. There, there, what use in going over it all? It's sick to the heart I am. I'm almost beat, Milner."

He crumpled the papers up and thrust them into his writing-case. One unopened remained on the table.

"What's this?"

His face grew white and set. He put it down and looked from me to Milner with terrified gaze.

"I must go! Can you put me on shore at once—to-night? Look here!"

"You're a dead man. The width of the seas won't save you; you'll never see land again," was the purport, stripped of its garnish of hideous expressions.

"A last attempt to frighten you. Put you on shore! Not a bit of it," said Milner. "The villains had your address at Yarmouth, but that's all they can do by post, so let them. And now listen!"

A strong, beautiful contralto voice began to sing a little Irish ballad, and we with one consent kept silence during a verse. Then it stopped.

"Is that right, Mr. Everett?" laughed Miss Dennistoun, "or might I go right through just for once?"

Heron dropped the letter and his cares simultaneously, it seemed, for he was on deck in a moment, begging for some more of the song.

"Oh, bold Rory O'More!" carolled Venetia. "Come and prompt me with the brogue." And she sang to us like a throstle till coffee came.

CHAPTER II.

I FOUND her alone on deck next morning.

"I want you particularly, Mr. Everett. Look at what blew into my cabin last night." And she held out the note that had so disturbed us all. "What does it mean?"

Her face was white, with dark shades under her eyes, and two anxious lines dented her white forehead.

"Nothing to be alarmed at, I assure you. That sort of thing arrives as regularly as the daily papers. Heron is quite accustomed to it. Threatened men live long, you know."

"I don't know it, and I don't believe it," she said impatiently. "I'm frightened. Others have been murdered for no better reason. Oh, why—why didn't he try the South Sea Islands? They couldn't have reached him there."

"And they can't reach him here, either," put in Milner, who had been listening unobserved. "I'll put him in irons if he attempts to go on shore. He'll be safe for a fortnight, at any rate, and the troubles will have blown over by that time."

"But—but——" She hesitated, glancing round and lowering her voice. "Are you sure no one can come on board unobserved, and hide?"

"Not unless he's packed in the ice—that is the only corner Everett and I did not overhaul yesterday morning."

"And your men?" she said, only half assured.

"Well, you shall satisfy yourself on that point, too," said Milner with admirable patience. "You know Beckwith? He was with the Psamathe when Lord Sedgewick had her, and so were Webster and Murdoch—not one of them has the slightest interest in the Irish question that I can discover. Hannigan is a friend of Murdoch's, I believe. He brought him, and Beckwith engaged and approved him, and Hannigan brought Lowry, and that's the history of the whole crew."

"Which is Hannigan? That's an Irish name. And where did Murdoch get him?" she asked suspiciously.

"He's not Irish though, and Beckwith says is steady enough, if not over bright. I'll point them out to you presently. Now do make yourself happy, like a good girl. If you're afraid of being in Heron's company——"

For all answer she tore the letter into a

shower of small pieces, and scattered them on the water.

"There, that's an end of the subject. Now for breakfast."

For all the girl's bright looks and gay chatter that day, I could see that the morning's scare had left an impression on her not easily to be shaken off. I saw her start at every unexpected noise, and found her deep in conversation with Beckwith, much to that important personage's gratification. She was always watching the men at their work, especially "O'Donovan" and "Rossa," as Milner persisted in calling them, and, as if in defiance of Milner's suggestion of cowardice, kept as close as she unobtrusively could to Heron, at whom I saw her gazing once or twice with a curious intensity of expression that made me think it was rather a fine thing to be a man with a Doom.

Scarborough came in due course. To go ashore or not?

"Who wants to see Scarborough in July?" said Venetia contemptuously, but it appeared everybody did.

"Only for a few hours," I said to her, "and I promise you I'll not lose sight of Heron for a moment."

She gave me a kind little look, blushing rosy red the while, and ashore we went.

The party divided, Mrs. Milner being on shopping bent, and we met at dinner at the hotel. I brought my Home Ruler back in safety, and expected at least a look of recognition, but Venetia was absent and tired, and anxious to get afloat again; so we bade farewell to Scarborough in the grey twilight, and set sail for Ernescliffe and the Madge who began to figure prominently in Mrs. Milner's conversation just now.

When Heron opened his letters that evening the Irish correspondence had dwindled to a report from his agent, neither better nor worse than the previous one, while the "literature of assassination" was conspicuous by its absence.

"They've lost the trail at last," said Milner triumphantly. "I told you so."

We felt as if the moral atmosphere of our party had suddenly lightened. Heron looked ten years younger; Milner and Miss Dennistoun were wild with light-heartedness; Mrs. Milner, the only one who had never been depressed, was the only one not unduly elated. Venetia sang for us, and appeared in resplendent toilettes, and declared she didn't care how much time

we expended creeping up the never-ending line of the Yorkshire coast.

I remember being rather startled by one of her pranks. It was the only summer day of all our holiday, a dead calm and a bright July sun. We were idly rocking on the water opposite a long line of bold black cliffs, with indentations here and there forming tiny bays of warm, brown, boulder-strewn sand. Not a sign of human life was visible on the wild lonely shore, and I turned away from the contemplation thereof, and descended in quest of light literature. I entered the cabin suddenly, eliciting a startled little shriek from Mrs. Milner, who was absorbed in the contemplation of a dazzling vision.

Miss Dennistoun in an amazing dress of white, crimson, and orange, tunicked, trousered, and cross-gartered, with her hair tucked away under a jaunty little cap bedecked with a rosette of the same colour. She was not in the least disconcerted, but drew herself up to her full height, her hands on either side of her striped belt, and laughed at me.

"Isn't it a pretty fancy dress?" she asked. "Just help me on with my ulster, please;" and she pocketed the cap, replacing it by a shady straw hat, and ran lightly up on deck.

"She is going to get old Webster to take her for a swim," Mrs. Milner explained. "You'll see something pretty presently."

So I did when I got on deck. The crimson cap was dancing about on the waves between us and the shore—diving, reappearing, floating quietly, shooting ahead at a tremendous rate; finally it made for some rocks, up one of which a white figure scrambled and disappeared.

"She's like a water-dog," said Milner. "I believe she got a Humane Society's medal once for some plucky feat."

Webster had beached the boat, and was serenely smoking on a boulder. After an interval I saw him returning, with a dignified young lady in a neat and proper serge costume steering; the bathing-dress lying like a moist, unpleasant body all of a heap at his feet.

"I felt inclined to swim back to you," she said. "I know I could have done it. Getting on board was the difficulty."

"You won't get another chance of astonishing us," I replied; "the wind is rising. We shall anchor in Ernescliffe Bay to-night."

She grew suddenly grave.

"Ernescliffe! Do you know what happened at Scarborough, Mr. Everett? Nora was so long over her purchases that I got tired, and went off for a ramble through the old town. I lost my way, and asked a man who was loitering under a shed full of fish-baskets to direct me. He said he couldn't. I didn't like his looks and went on, but as I passed I was sure I saw Lowry's face looking out of the shadow behind him, and heard some one say 'Ernescliffe' just as I came up. Beckwith declares no one went ashore that day but himself and Webster. I wish we were rid of those men, or safe in Cromarty Firth. No one gets shot in Scotland."

We dropped anchor about midnight, and next morning were hailed by a boat from the shore containing Madge and her vicar, the Rev. Eustace Sandys. Mrs. Sandys was very like her sister grown stout and matronly.

We went on shore, of course. Ernescliffe consists of a row of fishermen's cottages at the foot of a tall cliff, on the top of which the church is perched. A rough pier runs out to sea on the north side of the little bay, and close by is the vicarage, an embellished farmhouse. The parish extends miles inland, we were told, with a scanty, scattered population.

We strolled about on the vicarage lawn that evening, watching the little fleet of fishing-boats depart.

"The fish are in shoals out there to-night," said the vicar, joining us, fresh from his parochial round. "Everything that can swim has gone out. There isn't a boat except your own left in the place, or a man to pull it."

"Beckwith has asked leave to go out fishing," said Milner, "so I suppose I ought to go on board. When shall you be ready, Nora?" The sisters looked blank.

"I thought you all were going to stay here all night," said Mrs. Sandys in dismay.

"I can leave Nora and Venetia if they like," said Milner. "I'll send the boat for them to-morrow."

So it was settled, and we three departed.

The Psamathe looked very forlorn and empty when we reached her after the bright little vicarage. We missed the two fair faces and gay voices unspeakably. Milner fell asleep. Heron actually produced a blue-book, and fell to making extracts, and I, in solitary possession of the deck, leant over the side watching three figures pacing up and down under the verandah of the vicarage till it grew too dark to distinguish

Venetia's dark gown from the two white-robed sisters. I smoked, and meditated, and watched the movements of the nearest fishing-smacks with languid curiosity. We were about a mile inshore of them, and nearly as far from the end of the pier. The moon was getting up, bright and clear, and lights were moving about in the vicarage windows.

"Ten o'clock. Bedtime, I suppose, in these primitive regions," I yawned. "No, there's some one coming out on the lawn again. Miss Dennistoun!"

A dark figure sped across the grass and disappeared down a flight of rocky steps that led to the pier, which was in deep shadow except the extreme end, which just caught the moonlight. The dark figure emerged from the blackness, became at once a white one, and scrambled rapidly down a ladder at the end of the pier.

"Going for a moonlight swim, by Jove! Extraordinary young person she is!" I was indiscreet enough to use my glass, and could make out the red cap presently coming out in our direction. "She can't mean to swim to us. What will she do when she gets here, and how will she ever get back again?" I speculated in amazement, while stroke by stroke the dark speck on the water drew nearer. "Shall I call Milner? No. Better not say anything about the escapade. She's sinking! No, only resting. Confound it! Why don't I know how to get a boat round and go to meet her? It'll kill her this cold night. I will try and get the dingey. It's not there! What can I do?" I gazed distractedly at the red cap, becoming every moment more distinct, wind and tide helping her along. She must have seen me, for she waved a white arm as a signal—of what? "She is being carried out by the current," flashed across my mind, and I was on the point of calling for help, when I saw that she was making steadily for the Psamathe. Up she came at last, and seized one of the side-ladders. I helped her up, for she was utterly exhausted. I shall never forget her standing, tall and white, in the moonshine, the water streaming down her, and the hand imperiously raised to check all remark or question.

"Send Walter Milner to me at once," she gasped.

I threw a big cloak over her shoulders in silence, and obeyed. He came up wondering.

"You must leave the yacht directly! Every man of you!"

"Are you mad, Venetia? How on earth did you come?"

"Don't stop to ask me! Every moment brings you nearer to— Oh, Walter, in pity believe me! Those men—I knew it. Oh, where is Desmond Heron?"

"Come down below and I'll listen to you," he said.

"I shall spoil your velvet cushions," she said with a hysteric laugh as her pretty feet splashed in the pool of water on the deck.

I rushed down in advance, turned up the cabin stove, and put on the kettle and had routed out brandy and a tumbler before Heron raised his eyes from his notes.

"Venetia!" I heard him exclaim.

She had regained her breath and composure, and spoke quietly and convincingly.

"You must leave the Psamathe at once. Before midnight not one of us will be left to tell the tale. I heard Hannigan boast of it. He is on shore now, with Lowry. Go and see, if you disbelieve me."

Milner stood looking doubtful. Did he mean to drive the girl crazy?

"I believe you, Miss Dennistoun," I said. "We'll do whatever you order. It isn't eleven yet."

She gave me a grateful look.

"It has driven me frantic to think that perhaps, after all, you would only laugh at me. If you had heard those men and seen their faces! I can't tell you all they said, but it meant murder! Oh, why are we wasting time?"

"Where's Eustace Sandys?" said Milner; "and how did you come?"

"Called away to a sick person. I came as I could. Walter—Walter, do believe me! I was sitting down among the rocks there, Nora and Madge had gone in, when I saw the boat coming, and stayed to meet it; but when I saw Lowry's face—I don't know why—I waited; and instead of going to the pier, they beached it just by where I was standing, and then I crept near and heard them."

Milner hurried off, and Heron, who had been standing by the table listening, with a face as white as Venetia's, sank into his chair with a groan.

"Come," she said imperiously, "every moment is worth a life." But he shook his head hopelessly.

"Best leave me. I knew it would overtake me at last; but you—" He sprang up again suddenly. "What are you going to do? Get her away, Everett. Has Milner gone to get the boat?"

"Boats! They are all gone," I replied, and then the full meaning of my words rushed upon my mind and I stopped aghast.

"Can you not return as you came?" I asked Venetia.

She shook her head.

"I couldn't do it again, and I would not. Whatever comes I will meet it here."

Her hand dropped as if unconsciously on Heron's crippled arm.

"Everett! What are you saying?"

Heron cried wildly. "What does it all mean?"

"Death!" said Venetia solemnly, turning and laying her cold right hand in his.

I turned away and rushed up the cabin stairs.

"Hullo!" shouted Milner. "They're off, sure enough, and the dingy."

"What are you going to do?"

"Slip the cable, of course, get up the jib, and run her alongside that smack over there. Come and lend a hand, and tell those two to get their goods together if they really mean to clear out. Venetia, will you go and get some dry clothes on! If you'd make her drink that hot grog, Heron, instead of kissing her hands, it would be more to the purpose."

I must be excused from relating what I did that night under Milner's orders. We did slip the cable, and we did get up sail enough to carry us out to the smack, and I suppose my efforts contributed to the result, but I am quite unaware how. Milner kept up a grumbling soliloquy of incredulity the whole time. "Just a mad freak of the girl's, and I'm a big fool for minding her. Glad Beckwith isn't here. He wouldn't have been moved so easily. Wonder what those two rascals really are up to. Perhaps you had better go below and bring off anything you care about. What's the time—half-past eleven? Nice fools we shall look going on board to-morrow," and so forth.

When I returned with my portmanteau, I found the smack alongside, and the fishermen helping Milner to transfer the more valuable of his and Nora's possessions from the Psamathe, while Venetia stood leaning on Heron's arm, white with impatience. When we were safe on the fishing-boat, I noticed that she clung to a bundle of papers which she declined to relinquish to me, but which Heron took into his own keeping presently.

"My dear girl," I heard him say, "did you think of them?" And if they weren't his notes and his precious old blue-book!

We stood off some distance from the Psamathe, and watched her swaying to and fro on the wavelets, a graceful black outline against the moonlit sea.

"Poor thing!" I heard Milner say, "it's a dirty trick to leave you. I've half a mind to go back. I wonder where Beckwith is? I wouldn't be you, Venetia, when we tell the tale to-morrow!"

A crash, not loud, but sharp; a wave that lifted the smack and pitched her over on her side. When she righted, we looked for the Psamathe.

Gone!

There was a foaming eddy in the water, a few black fragments tossing here and there—that was all. Some spars and shattered pieces of timber came ashore by the morning's tide, the only relics of Mr. Milner's beautiful pet and plaything, the Psamathe.

We were a doleful little party on the vicarage lawn next morning. Mrs. Milner was still tearful and trembling at the thoughts of her husband's peril, Heron remorseful, and Miss Dennistoun meek and shy beyond all comprehension. The vicar had gone early, to set the county constabulary on the track of the two sailors, with small hopes of success.

"They're in Liverpool by this time," he said. "We shall hear of them in New York, hailed as heroes and patriots by the 'dynamite faction,' and most likely presented with an address and testimonial from the 'Skirmishing Fund.' Why, the feat, if it had been successful, would almost have guaranteed Hannigan's return to Parliament one of these days."

Desmond Heron turned away. I saw the vicar's pleasantries cut deeply.

"Don't mind it. It's only nonsense," whispered Venetia eagerly.

"It's the Truth in it that stings," he said.

"Remember your promise," she murmured in a lower tone. "Let it all go. You have done no good by standing by your people. Let them take their own way now. The day will come when they will welcome you back, and know their true friends from their false leaders. You will go away, and wait for the good time coming," she pleaded.

"My good time will have begun, my darling, if you come with me."

I withdrew in haste. I had thought I was only listening to a political discussion. As usual I turned for refuge and consolation to my fair liege lady, Mrs. Milner.

"You brought me here," I complained.

"My affections have been tampered with, my luggage lost, my holiday spoilt. You have the insurance to console you. The two yonder don't seem to need any consolation; but what remains for me?"

"Go and win fame and fortune by making a magazine story of it all," was her reply, and now, as always, I have obeyed.

THE OLD STORY OF HARISHAL CHASE.

By MARIA L. JENKIN.

CHAPTER I.

No one could be more surprised than we were ourselves when we were told that father was heir to Harishal Chase. The news came one morning when mother, and he, and I, their only child, sat at breakfast. A village doctor does not look for many letters, not such a village doctor as father was, at least, for I verily believe he had no interest whatever beyond the village.

However, the news was a fact; and our simple life became what was to me a grand one. So many new things came to be done, that in my ignorance I wondered fifty times a day to see how calmly mother took it all. The fact was, she never changed at all. She talked to the Earl and the Countess, the Duke and the Duchess, in just the same sweet way as she had talked to the untitled folks of Warbury.

She rather disconcerted me one day by saying she was sorry so much grandeur had come to us. She was bound to accept facts, she said, but she thought law had travelled a long way round to arrive at such a distant offshoot as my father, and to find in him the heir of the Payntons. To "hark back," so to speak, for four generations, and then to toil forward to a village—for Warbury, if it called itself a town, was scarcely more than a village—and then to alight upon him, Thomas Warton, it was strange.

However, no thought or desire of hers could change what the law decreed, so father gave his practice to Cousin Horace, who had been studying under him, and one day we drove away from Warbury, and arrived at the Chase.

Such a dear old place! Sunset in early spring brought out all the beauties of it, I remember, when we drove up the long avenue to the great portico. The avenue was of limes, and on one

side you could see between their trunks over the vague distance of the park, while on the left came the thickness of a copse. So far, Harishal Chase was well known to me; had I not been familiar with all that could be seen of it from the lodge-gates below the avenue? But of what came behind the portico I knew nothing.

Ever since I had been old enough to sit securely in the seat by father as he drove on his rounds, I had known the place, and the big gates with the curious winged animal in stone on the supporting pillars.

But to be within—to be the young mistress of all—to learn the name of the winged monster, to see him carved over doorways, to see him on the liveries of the servants, and to know that he belonged to me!

Father said he was a griffin rampant regardant—that was Greek to me, but it sounded grand.

One thing more he told me I did not like so well—to be Millicent Warton was all very well, but to be turned into Millicent Warton-Paynton I did not like.

Now I think mother rather liked this part of the business.

Anyway it had to be done. The title of the Payntons "lapsed," she told me, but the old name must be kept up. Another point I discovered soon after that she liked also, and this was that the old Harishal property, which had dwindled a good deal, was to be built up by father's wealth, and by her wealth.

We had been such simple folk that though I was seventeen at this time I had never grasped the idea of wealth as concerning ourselves at all. I did not in the least comprehend one speech mother made on the day I was packing up my private treasures at Warbury.

"Quite a burden for these shoulders, Milsie dear," she had cried.

"Burden, mother! I am equal to it." I lifted my untidy head proudly, for I felt every inch a Harishal dame at that moment.

"The heir and the heiress in one." Mother's voice was gay, but suddenly she was grave. "It is a foolish speech, dear; forget it."

Which I did directly after, but somehow it cropped back into my brain, puzzling it.

Life became supremely delightful at one bound. Even supposing no one had come to see us, the dear old house was a mine of pleasure. I got the old housekeeper to take

me into every hole and corner, and in a week I knew the history of every Paynton who stood pictured within the old frames round the dining-room. One was of a young girl kneeling on the ground, with her arm round a fawn's neck.

"Ah, she is pretty!" I cried.

"You think so, miss?" and the old woman looked oddly at me, I thought. "You see that other one?" she pointed to another, where again a young girl was pictured. This second stood erect, and she looked both proud and sad.

"Yes," I answered.

"The minnit as I set eyes on you, miss, I said there's no mistake about the old blood; she's like the picture without the name."

"Who was like, do you mean?"

"Who but yourself, miss!"

"Me?"

"Aye, just that. Them two, you see, have no name, for they are the same."

"The same?" I echoed. One was a playing child, and one was a stately maiden.

"Aye," she nodded her head wisely.

"She was Lady Diana, we all knew that, and grief took her somehow. Grief or sin—who knows? They blotted out her name nigh a hundred year ago, and they two pictures only come down from the loft through some mistaken order of the late lord's. Being down they need not go up again, he said."

Now, what girl of seventeen is not ripe for mystery? I made the old woman's life a burden to her for the next week trying to learn the story, but she could not tell it to me for the best of all reasons—she did not know it.

However, by persistent questionings I learnt what ghostly traditions hung about the place. There had been a ghost, of course, but she could give no reliable history of its being seen in the ken of living man. There was a ghost, too, belonging to the laurel path—a path that led away from the copse to a waste of uncultivated land called the heath. She—that was a she-ghost—had been seen.

"When some one is going to die, of course," I irreverently ejaculated.

"No, miss; it comes at a birth. If the babe is to have a good life, it—she—dances; but, if not, the creature falls to weeping and wringing its hands."

"Is that all?"

"Enough, too."

"And no secret passages, or trap-doors, or——"

"Hist!" the old dame stopped me.

"Ah, there is something!" I sprang forward and seized her hands. "Tell me."

"There beant nought to tell, as I knows of," and her mouth shut with a jerk.

"Then why did you bid me 'hist'?" I urged.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose I was getting a bit worried, miss," she said with the most simple manner; "it's all a folly to me, this sort of thing. We han't no call that I see to ferret out the ways of folks who'd nothing but the Dark Ages to live in, and all the rooms are done up most fashionable, and as to cleanliness, none'll beat Harishal Chase at that, I know, though the maids are set up nowadays."

I could get nothing out of her. But in my own mind I was convinced that the Chase held some secret, some hidden room, or passage, or cupboard—who could say what? I was determined to hunt up every likely and unlikely place, and to make the discovery for myself.

This was in the first week of our being in the house, and though for another full week I held my purpose clearly and firmly before my eyes, yet there was no chance thrown in my way of carrying it out. Every obstacle was rather set against it.

Now all the world knows that the most adamant obstacles are those which appear soft, and yielding, and pleasant, which must account, I suppose, for my never surmounting any of them. I was seemingly beset with pleasure and enjoyment.

In the old life at Warbury, to be seventeen was a charming fact, but it did not bring of itself a marked change of existence. Now, for the daughter of Harishal Chase to be seventeen, meant that she was not only a girl with the delight of youth about her, with her new lovely home, too, but she must be launched at once into society. No more schoolroom days for her!

But I must not say so much of my own story—I must travel on.

Three weeks in my dear Harishal Chase, then we went up for the season, just a short season, to London.

I forgot my search after the mysterious—utterly and entirely forgot it. But I did not forget my sudden love for the Chase. If it was a love at first sight, it was also a continuing love, and perhaps it was, as Mrs. Marley, the housekeeper, had once

said, "the old blood" in my veins, which so strongly made me take the place to my heart, and so entirely to weave the fibres of my being round every stone of it.

London was lovely! Do not laugh at my word, to me everything was "lovely." Certainly I was childlike enough. Once, when I put on a new hat which, in its modern way, copied the old fashion of that unnamed girl's portrait, I saw myself just like her—like the girl who played with the fawn. And I laughed at myself, wondering how it would ever be possible that I should also look like the second portrait, the grave, sad maiden.

There was but one trouble in that delightful time.

It all came from my being unluckily both "heir and heiress." I was Miss Paynton of Harishal. I cried angrily when I saw how I was, so to speak, ticketed and labelled in this fashion. Actually, people came and made love to me! And lovers, too, that I could never dream of marrying. One was a grey-headed man, and another was a boy with a lisp—but he was an earl's son.

"You are quite sure, Milsie?" my father said in his easy, kindly way.

"Sure! I should think I was," retorted I, giving much more of my attention to Toby, my pug, than to the subject of lovers.

"I cannot say I am sorry, child." He evidently was relieved, and turned his newspaper as if he had now every intention of enjoying it undisturbed. "An evil of the future, my love," he said to my mother; "the future, not the present."

"An evil and a good at once," came the answer, in mother's calm, gentle way. "She is a child now."

"Dear mother, I am seventeen!" and I tweaked my dog's ear.

"Yes. Some day you will understand, Milsie—I hope you will understand," she went on quietly. "But there is no hurry."

"That old fossil presuming——" I began.

"Sir Gerard Milnes! Ha, ha!" and my father laughed. "I knew him in petticoats. I'll tell him what you call him."

"Do," and I laughed with him.

"There is time," mother went on, half to herself. "Only we will hope for a wise love when the love does come—a wise and a suitable love."

"That is because I am labelled 'Harishal Chase!' I felt my face hot, and I

drew up my tall self. "I have a great mind to say I will never marry. I half wish the Chase had gone to someone else! No," and I hugged my fat Toby, "no; I don't mean that!"

On the evening of that very day we were at a ball, and a certain Mr. Dacre danced with me. All my other partners had a title of some sort, so, having a persistency in my character by which I held to my wild and ignorant rebellion of the morning, I snubbed all these, and talked comfortably only with the said Mr. Dacre.

The day after, he, with the rest, slipped out of my thoughts, from the simple reason that I was obliged by the very force of circumstances to go to other entertainments, and to see quite another set of people.

At last we went home, and I was full of delight at the country, and often said I should be content never to leave my dear old Chase again.

When the shooting began we had visitors, and some of the tiresome London people came—tiresome only to me. But I—I suppose time naturally brought it to me—did not trouble so much about these things. I think I could make myself quite as haughty when I chose as any one of the former maidens of Harishal Chase had done.

In November came an event. I should be eighteen on the twenty-sixth, and I was to have a ball. Everybody came. Last, but not least, came many officers from the Warford barracks. And amongst them came a—my—Mr. Dacre. Only a lieutenant; only a man of no family at all; only a penniless young soldier.

I saw him a few times after the ball—only a few times. Then he absented himself. Duty kept him at Warford, but it was not regimental duty which kept him studiously away from any of the roads leading from that town towards Harishal.

Shall I ever forget the day when, after calling on mother, he met me along the avenue of limes?

Early December may be as warm as summer—that day was so. The earth was moist, and the aromatic, pungent smell of the prone leafage and bracken filled the air. The low yellow light of the day was reddened by the westering crimson sun; along the path of his rays danced a million radiant motes on a misty floor—"Good-bye" was the word it all carried to me.

And why? Just because I was heiress of Harishal Chase, and he—he—was nothing.

I dallied till the twilight came, and then, passing the door of the big drawing-room where we had danced together, I turned in and paced it alone.

I had forgotten mysteries and ghosts, I cared naught for the darkness.

I went to a corner window, and I looked out—so looking my feet must have kicked impatiently. They lifted a corner of the heavy carpet, they got entangled, or rather, by some sudden wakefulness of my brain, I knew that one foot touched iron and neither the carpet nor the wood of the floor beneath it.

I started. There was an iron rusted ring fastened on to a plank of the floor—nay, it lay in a carefully made groove cut in the wood. The circling crevices were filled with dust and flue, and all was so close and compact that a hundred feet might have passed over it and never have felt a variety of level.

I all at once remembered the house-keeper's half-terrified "Hist!"

CHAPTER II.

WAS I likely to let my discovery slip? By no means.

All the household was told of it; and, behold! my news fell flat, for all the household knew of it. Instead of curiosity, I met shrinking. No man or maid had the least desire to see if that old ring would move.

My father laughed at me; but mother—I should never have given her credit for it!—really flushed, and was, for her, quite excited. She so entirely identified herself with the ownership of the Chase, you see, and being of a county family herself, no doubt made her the more ready to magnify the importance of the old histories of the place. Sweet, good mother! if there were anything in her composition which bordered upon the nature of a fault, it was this pride of family. For the honour and glory of one's family our sacrifices should be unmeasured.

Ah me! I am writing this with the knowledge and experience of a few years behind me.

The first of those years might be said to begin at this time.

I had given away my love. And my lover—he was so proud—could not declare himself. The others who came I flung

aside as one dashes away gnats on a summer day.

And I said I would solve the mystery of that iron ring. Though I was growing a little sad at heart, I made much show of gaiety, and scorning lovers, talked of this purpose of mine.

It was strange, but I could get no workman to help me.

So time went on, and the obstacles grew stronger than my fading spirits. You see, I hoped and hoped for what could not come. I could not unmake my heiressship, neither could I make Paul Dacre a noble.

A winter and a spring passed over my head, and I was changed. To take Mrs. Marley's verdict, I was just a copy of the Lady Diana. "More's the pity! For your face, miss, is prettier with the smiles."

I did not pay much heed to her. I had too much to think of.

Then, in the summer, Sir Gerard Milnes presented himself again, and my father had to give me his message. Now, Sir Gerard had the finest property in the county, and mother had set her heart on my marrying him. My kind, easy father would not force me; but mother's persuasions, and, I think, her very tenderness and ambition for me, conquered my utter carelessness.

Yes, I had grown utterly careless, and had changed from a child Milsie to a proud Millicent.

I said I would try—he might come.

He was a noble and a worthy man. He did come to me out on the terrace, and I had to listen.

How my heart and soul rebelled! All the fire which had seemed quenched in me rose into hotter flames. How I vexed him with my wild, laughing words, and would neither say "Yes" or "No."

"I am tired," I cried; and, turning from him, I went straight into the drawing-room by one of its long windows.

My dignity had entirely left me for the nonce, and as I sprang in my foot caught the very corner of carpet it had once before caught.

There was the mysterious iron ring in the floor once more uncovered.

"There is a trial for you, if you are a chivalrous knight," I cried.

I knew Sir Gerard was close behind me.

"For my lady, no trial is too great."

He caught my humour. "What is it? I conquer it, and come for——"

There he stopped, and looked at me with his brave, true eyes.

"For the prize, the guerdon!" I was wild, and yet even on that warm June day I suddenly grew chill. "Give me the secret, and I give you myself! I am not worth the taking."

At the moment I cared for nothing.

"Worth much to me," he said gravely, and, before I knew, he had lifted my hand and kissed it.

Now, no Harishal man would obey him for this work, so he sent for London men to do it.

Such a little thing, after all—only to soften the rust, to lift the ring, to press and to shake, and to use just a man's natural force. A neatly-fitted plank moved, and, being lifted, showed a space full of dirt and rubbish; then some groping, and a tin box came to light. Anything more?

Only a bundle of papers, with a faded ribbon tied round them.

"My!" exclaimed Mrs. Marley, who, of course, was present. "The ribbon is like what ties the fan in Lady Diana's picture! I never!"

The tin box father opened, and found some old jewels—rare ones, and valuable, and of antique fashion. He laughed and he gave them to me, saying:

"Finders must be keepers."

The papers mother read.

And my promise—my promise! How could I ever keep it?

Here is what the papers told.

At the top was written:

"THIS IS THE TRUTH.

"No one knows the whole truth of what I, Diana Paynton, have done. Someone will, perchance, open the secret hiding-place. They will brave the curse set upon the opener, but the curse will be powerless then, for I am the first who has opened it. The curse of an unknown ancestor is naught to me, for did not my own father set his curse upon me last night?

"But my heart will not tremble under it—no! Only this morning, too, I read that 'The curse causeless shall not fall,' and I have done no wrong. If to me love stands before wealth, who shall say that is wrong?

"I am ordered to my room; I am a prisoner, but freedom will come. While I wait, I write.

"In a sense I am dead. Oh, that there could be love and trust between father and child! I have never known the day when aught but fear came into my soul when I was carried into the stern presence of my father.

"Perhaps he was proud of me. Now that I am dead there is no heiress to Harishal Chase, and it will go to his nephew's son. Stay—the future may cure the past.

"It has all happened in so short a time.

"We were in London. We, like the rest of the quality, must go once a year, though it is such a weary journey. Father must be in his place at the House, and aunt and I must go to routs and assemblies, and give the same ourselves. Our house by the river and by the Chelsea fields is happily on the outskirts of the noisy town.

"It was Lady Betty Carew's drum. Now, Lady Betty is not to my taste. She belongs to the past days, when dames of fashion used language we think coarse and rude now. But aunt affects her, I suppose because the two are so exactly opposite. Poor weak auntie must surely be under some fascination of strong Lady Betty.

"For some reason, her ladyship can command the first society. One is sure of meeting people of ton there. Men, too, give up other things for her, and at one of her drums you are sure to meet what she is pleased to call 'the sprightliest blades about town.'

"She fell upon aunt and me that day with her loudest laugh.

"Glad to see you, Nan Paynton!" she cried. "And my Lady Diana looking her freshest. Who would not be a Paynton to live outside the smoke? What did it cost your father to build his mansion? But there, it is no use talking, I've lost too many guineas lately to think of building! Besides, I'm hardened to the smoke and din of my quarters. I call my chair, and I'm in the Strand in two minutes. Who here is strange to you? None, I believe."

"I see Mistress Delaney," aunt put in. "I have been dying to ask her how she succeeds with her new silk work."

"Silk work? Ah, she'll tell you. I never was good at such things!" Then some one else was announced, and Lady Betty went off.

"I sat down and talked, and looked about me. There was but one stranger in the room. A tall, dark young man. How can I describe him? He was hand-

some, and he bore himself with a cool dignity. Certainly he was a gentleman, and he was dressed in perfect fashion, though there was something about him totally unlike the foppish or rakish look of the men Lady Betty affected. His dress was of a dark sombre hue, and the cambric of his exquisitely set shirt-frill was of the finest. I did not think I was noticing him as pointedly as I must have been doing.

"I was shocked by a laugh of Lady Betty's.

"Ha, ha, ha! My dainty Diana is amazed! And well she may be. Now, my friends all, I have bid you here just to make you acquainted with a star—a star, and my friend, Signor Paolo!" The stranger flushed, but he bowed quietly. He must have been accustomed to many ways of this varied world.

"He's no signor, though we have settled that a foreign name tickles folk's ears; he is English to the backbone. He has already taken the town by storm. You have heard of him?"

"I had certainly heard of a celebrated musician who had played at Court. One or two said as much.

"Ah well, that is one thing. He means, and I mean too, that he shall line his pockets well with gold before he goes off to Italy. Spoil the Egyptians, I call it."

"A quiet smile crossed his face.

"You, my Lady Bruton, and you, Nan Paynton—that means you, Diana," came in an aside, "are leaders of fashion." She jerked her hawk-like face in another direction and shook her fan at some young officers. "And you, gentlemen, you'll give your military concerts, and you'll have a civilian to fiddle for you till you grow white with envy."

"By all means, Lady Betty; by all means!" laughed one. "May we ask Mr.—Mr.—"

"Signor Paolo," she supplied.

"The signor to play us a measure now?"

"Such playing I had never heard. It carried my very soul away with it.

"Presently, when aunt and I were taking leave—we had had the good fortune to exchange a few words with the stranger—Lady Betty pulled her back by the sleeve.

"She nodded her head at me, and her sharp old eyes twinkled.

"You'll take him up, Di; you can

do it. Nothing like a girl with manners to back a man who wants to rise. I'll back you when it comes to the permission of Paynton for your concert."

"Thank you."

"Don't go in for meekness, Diana. Speak out. But," she actually winked, did this disagreeable old woman, "so far and no farther. You know! No philandering, mind; nothing of that sort. No philandering!"

"I would not answer this, was it not beneath me? I saw, too, that the stranger was close by. I grew scarlet at the thought that he might have overheard Lady Betty's coarseness.

"He it was who, with a deep bow, led aunt and me to our coach.

"Signor Paolo became the rage, no assembly was complete without him. People said that his engagements, as the first violinist of the day, were so numerous that not half of those who invited him could secure him. That was not my experience. To me he seemed to be everywhere.

"Now I am proud to know the reason of this. He always knew where I would be. Soon he spoke bravely and openly to me, and I saw no shame in aiding his desire to meet me. If rank of one sort was mine, he held rank by his great genius. Besides, though I wished no such declaration on his part, he insisted on telling me his family history. He comes of a good south-country family—aye, he bears a name as good as my own. Soon it will be my own.

"We left London before my father did, and we, aunt and I, were glad to accept the escort of Signor Paolo—I call him by the name the world knows him by—and of Sir Harry Milton, our neighbour. The roads are too insecure for ladies to travel in assurance, even though our servants are trusty and brave.

"Both gentlemen rode by our coach the whole way down, and whether by their valiant bearing, or to the fact of the northern road being deserted for the nonce by the gentlemen of the road, we suffered no molestation, and reached the Chase safely.

"The dear place! Shall I never see it again? To leave it is surely like leaving one's mother. I never knew mine; but still, for love one is willing, aye, and glad, to leave even father and mother!

"Being the guest of our neighbour, Paul—I am weary of the foreign name—was at the Chase nigh upon every day.

"A week hence my father came home.

"He came upon us suddenly. He had chosen to dismount at the lodge and to walk up the avenue of limes. Aunt was gardening, with Sir Harry in attendance. How kind he was! Paul and I sat on a bench under a reddening beech-tree.

"Our story was in our eyes.

"Shame is upon me when I recall my father's words. I cannot write them down, I only know that he, a gentleman, called another gentleman a 'cur,' and threatened to 'horsewhip him off his land.'

"Paul rose quietly, and answered as quietly, that 'No man should touch him. But I obey the Lady Diana,' said he.

"Go, go!" I cried.

"He turned white.

"No, no, I could not really have him go, and I seized his hand. He bent his head low over my two hands, lifting them and kissing them with a noble reverence.

"The spinney, to-night," I whispered.

"Was this unmanly? I hope not. I knew my father, and could I bear that Paul should go without some softening of that cruel scorn and disdain?

"Two days have gone by—only two days, and I know that I shall never again see the golden Harishal fields, or wander again in the grand Harishal woods. But I am glad—so glad. The rich harvest is blessing the land, and it seems to me that all my growing life is perfected in my great harvest of love.

"There is nothing more to say. I have untied the tansy ribbon from my fan ready to roll round my papers.

"Last night father cursed me.

"To-night I am a prisoner in my room, but I can pass by an inner door into the ante-chamber, and so out on to the passage which leads to the back stairs, then through the still-room and the buttery—it is the only way—to aunt's parlour and the drawing-room. There I will hide my story, and then— Then I shall have my dark hood on, and a brown muffler about my face, and I shall fly like the wind, down the lime avenue, across the spinney, and on to the open heath; horses will be there, and Paul will be there."

CHAPTER III.

"THE future may cure the past!"

How those slight words of the old story clung to my brain!

Mother read it to us; she cried a little once, at which I wondered, for I was flush-

ing with my own sympathy for Lady Diana. Whether it was so or not, I felt that now there was more alike in our two selves than old Mrs. Marley had discovered. I built a vast edifice of romance about the love of Mr. Dacre and myself.

Of late I had not seen him at all, so there we were unlike Lady Diana and her signor. Paul, I was sure, would be too proud—I think also I should be too proud myself—to run away. But, you see, neither running away, nor an open marriage, came within my questioning, for Mr. Dacre would not declare himself to my father.

My lover surely was a most noble man; he held my promise, but though I saw him during the whole time of the discovery, and the consequent excitement; though I heard his words about the Lady Diana; though he stood by me as we looked with a new and a sad interest at her two pictures; though he said in his courteous way, that though he saw the likeness which I bore to the paintings, yet they were as a shadow to the substance; still—he never claimed my promise.

It seemed to me that he was waiting for a sign from me. And I could not give it. I was hot with rebellion and cold with despondency at the same time.

On the morning after we had read the old story I wandered out beyond the copse to the open heath; I fancied I would tread over again the very path which Lady Diana's feet had trod that autumn night.

Again it was the same grand and glorious autumn, young autumn, when the richest wealth of fruit, and corn, and radiant colour is poured on the earth by teeming Nature; an August sun burned over the purple heather, and caught flashes of golden light from the patches of gorse which are always to be seen all the year round. I had gone there thinking I would dream and see the moonlight and the lovers of that olden time—I could picture nothing at all of it.

I only thought of myself, and though they could not possibly have any connection with me and my troubles, those words of the story that "the future might cure the past" came ringing in my ears.

When noon made the sun too hot to bear, I sauntered back through the shady copse and lime avenue.

My father and Sir Gerard Milnes, with another gentleman, Mr. Bright, the lawyer from Warbury, were standing under the great portico talking—and talking gravely. Sir Gerard saw me first.

He took my hand.

"Am I to have my reward to-day?" he asked in a low voice.

"Oh!" I exclaimed; I am sure my manner was not gracious. "I cannot break my word," I answered after recollecting myself. "Father must answer for me."

"Milsie, Milsie! That is what I cannot do," his face shadowed.

A flash of my wild humour crossed me.

"Who will, then?" I cried. "Will you, Mr. Bright? I cannot answer for myself—not as people seem to wish, at least."

"Have you heard, child? Why do you refer to Bright?" asked my father hurriedly.

"Simply because he happened to be here."

"The discovery of last night, my young friend, entails——" began the lawyer in what was, I suppose, his business manner.

"Entails naught in this matter," Sir Gerard stopped him.

"Nay—nay, let her know."

"Another mystery," I cried, holding my gayest manner as a sort of mask to my real feelings.

"We do not know. If so, it is one which we must disentangle at once, I hope in such a way as to keep things in their present happy and—yes, Mr. Paynton, I must add—most suitable condition."

"We don't know—we don't know," hurried my father. "Milsie, do you understand how it is that Harishal came to me?"

"Simply because Lord Paynton died without children or grandchildren, or nephews or nieces."

"Just so. But, child, I am a descendant of that nephew's son to whom the property fell by the loss or death of that Lady Diana whose story you found."

"Then, as she did not die, and very likely had sons, and grandsons, and all the rest of it, Harishal is not ours, but theirs!"

"You seem glad, child."

So I was—so I was! Ah, if the heiressship were to slip from my shoulders! But I was ashamed almost of my gladness so plainly declaring itself.

"I shall hate—yes, hate to leave Harishal! The dear place!"

This impulse of mine was as real as the other. I buried my face in my hands.

"I must have it all well searched out, Bright," said my father, ignoring me.

"Lose no time, and spare no trouble. What was the signor fellow's name?"

"At present I do not know. I am

ignorant of the men who, at that time, were the fashion in the musical world. But we have the date, and the name will be found in a trice. An Englishman, we know. But these musicians, or more truly their families, often drop down in the social scale. I should be sorry to see Harishal go in such a way."

So the search began.

It must have been difficult to trace, for some weeks passed before we knew all.

Can you imagine the truth?

We had no guests for the shooting that September, and time went slowly. Restfully and peacefully to me, though, for I had father on my side, and he would not have me marry Sir Gerard Milnes as heiress of Harishal, when probably I was nothing but what he laughingly called "an old village doctor's daughter."

Sir Gerard submitted, but we all knew it was no heiress he sought, but just a girl to whom he had given his love.

In the brisk September air I loved to scour the country on my pony. One morning I came in, and throwing the reins to a servant, held up my habit with one hand, and with the other brushed back the wisps of curly hair which, like so much wind-blown tow, were flying over my eyes, and tickling my nose.

"Will you go into the library, miss?" I was asked.

I went, and who should be there but—I took no heed of my father or of Sir Gerard, or mother, or Mr. Bright—but, Mr. Dacre!

"Ah!" I exclaimed, and my face burned like fire, and then, I am sure, went white like ashes.

"This is my daughter——" father began.

"We are old friends," was the answer.

"Ah yes. You've been our guest; but, my good sir, can I be expected to remember all the faces who came that night? Thank goodness, I shall have no more of that!"

There was a deprecating gesture for answer.

"No, no. No sorrow, and no regrets. You are far more the man for it than I am. We'll come and see you—always supposing you invite us!" he ended in his cheery, easy way.

"Miss Payn—Miss Millicent," said the little lawyer, "this is the heir."

What I looked like, none can tell.

"Who shall tell the story of the heiresship?" he looked to Mr. Dacre. "Will you, or shall I?"

"You," my old friend nodded.

"Lady Diana Paynton, or rather, Lady Diana Dacre, had a son. Like her husband, he was Paul, and a musician. Wealth grew, and ambition was fostered by the mother. That son had a son, also Paul; but by his grandmother's will he was sent to college, and was made a clergyman of. You follow me?"

"Yes," I gasped.

"That clergyman, the Rev. Paul Dacre, died four years ago, leaving one son and three daughters—here is the son, again a Paul Dacre. I never saw so clear a business!" Mr. Bright rubbed his hands in glee.

"I remember my great-grandmother, I think," mused Mr. Dacre; "she was far past ninety when she died; but I clearly remember a tall old lady, who awed me very much, putting her hand upon my head. It is a dim, but I believe a sure memory. I must have been no more than three years old. I am twenty-five now—still I can remember it."

They talked together a little longer, those four men.

Mother thought I was troubled, and slipped her hand within my arm. I was not one whit troubled.

Then she whispered one little word.

It was like a flash of lightning to me. It illumined everything—all I had understood, and all I had failed to understand. By this last I mean that not for one moment had I felt I was not still, as society would say, "above"—how I hate the word!—Paul Dacre.

I saw now. He was owner of Harishal, and I was—nothing. I drew myself up, and I slipped away from mother's touch. Her ambition for me, that tender, loving ambition, stung me!

"I am myself," I cried.

My eyes sought no one, but Sir Gerard's pained face struck me. I could not help a low cry bursting from me, and I threw myself on my knees before him.

"Forgive me—forgive me!" I cried.

His hand lifted me.

"Nay," said he, "there is nothing to forgive. We—I—made a mistake. Warton," he turned to my father, and somehow that giving of the old name seemed to bring back the old times, "you will forget our talks—our talks about—"

Mother's face flushed, and I thought she almost looked angry, but, you see, she could not understand, knowing nothing.

"About Milsie?" blundered father.

Sir Gerard left me, and laid his hand on father's shoulder.

"Let us wait, my friend. I am called abroad for a few weeks."

I think Paul must have understood the whole matter at a glance. I should have done so had I been in his place.

He flushed slightly. But in the presence of all he told the other secret—his and my secret which we had thought to hide away.

Sir Gerard did go away, but not for long, because both mother and Paul wrote to him, and asked him to be sure and be at the Chase one morning in October.

That morning was our wedding-morning. You see, I never left the Chase. Father built a house on the edge of the park, and he says he is happier there. I only half believe him, because every day he comes sauntering in to Paul and me.

The likenesses of Lady Diana are put in the place of honour now. I wonder whether she knows how "the future has cured the past"?

THE CAPTAIN'S COXSWAIN.

By F. TALBOT.

HAZE and darkness hung about the river-mouth, while a lurid patch of light, where the sun was invisibly setting, brought into sudden prominence the little low-lying spit of land with the tall masts of the ships of war; the old hulks sullen and motionless; the cluster of houses, with the gaunt-looking forts, and the cloud of white steam from the funnels of the great armour-clad Terrible, as she lay slowly forging ahead against the incoming tide. Every pulse in the huge leviathan had begun to throb, the men were at their stations, the engines slowly moving; but still it seemed as if the great ship were hesitating to plunge into the cold sea mist and the rising surges that were before her.

A group, composed of women chiefly, with an old boatman or two among them, were gathered at the pier-head, and watched every movement on board the ship with interest, recognising every now and then some familiar form among the group of seamen gathered on the fore-castle.

"There's Jack—bless him! Tommy, shake your hand at daddy. He sees us—bless his heart!" And Tommy was almost

dropped into the water, in his mother's anxiety that he should be well in evidence before the crew of the *Terrible*. Why the ship thus dallied over the parting, so painful to many both on board and ashore, was quite evident to the onlookers. The captain's gig still lay by the stairs, bobbing, rolling, and ducking in the unquiet waters, while the smart man-o'-war's men who manned her, lounged easily on their seats. They, as it happened, all hailed from distant parts, and had no friends or relations on shore with whom to exchange last words. All but the coxswain, that is, a dark, handsome young fellow, who was standing under the lee of the round-house on the pier, a little apart from the rest.

Tom Brettle, the coxswain of the captain's gig, was as nearly unmaned as such a fine manly fellow could be. He was holding his wife's two hands in a firm and fervid grasp, as in tones which he tried hard, but not very successfully, to make firm and coherent, he poured into her ears his last parting words. The pair had not been long married, and Tom thought it the hardest thing in the world that he should have to leave his little wife, on whom he looked with an almost reverent affection. Her cleverness, her pretty ways, her organising power, were to him a matter of perpetual wonder and admiration. And now they would not meet again perhaps for years, and who could say what might not happen in the interval? As for the wife—who was young and rather good-looking, with features of a sharp vivacious cast—although there were tears in her eyes, and her face was white and wan, yet she retained more composure than her husband.

"Now you must write to me every week, Tom," she said, "and the time won't seem so long after all, perhaps."

"It feels like for ever, Penny," groaned Tom. "My girl, I can't bear it! I shall desert at the first port we touch at, and come back to thee."

"Don't talk nonsense, Tom!" rejoined his wife; "you don't mean it."

In another moment Tom had given his wife a hurried, passionate embrace, and had leaped into his place in the captain's gig. The captain himself was to be seen hurrying towards the pier-head, and presently he took his seat, and the boat rapidly cut through the rough water till she reached the ship, when in a few moments she seemed to become absorbed in the great mass, swinging quietly on her davits, out of the way. Penelope could

make out her husband's figure for a moment as he appeared in the rigging. Then a few wafts of white smoke rolled from the dark sides of the ship, and before the echo of the roar of the great guns had died away in the distance, the *Terrible* was steaming away on her voyage, and was presently lost to sight in the gathering mists.

Penelope turned away with a shiver and a sigh, and as the group of spectators melted away, she followed in the wake of them towards the town. Just then the dockyard-bell began to ring, and the dull, quiet street, with its long dead walls, its guard-houses and grog-shops, was all of a sudden occupied by a dark and sombre-looking mass of workmen, who tramped along in a dense unbroken column, that seemed to have no end. There was no escape from this army on the march, for the way, lying over military bridges and between jealously guarded bastions, was single and undivisible, else Penelope, with swollen eyes and white, sad face, would gladly have escaped observation. Presently she was overtaken by a middle-aged workman, who unceremoniously nudged her elbow.

"Hallo! what, he's gone then? Well, you see what comes of marrying a sailor."

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Ames, is it," rejoined Penelope, who had turned round sharply at the brusque address.

But this was Tom's brother-in-law, the husband of his sister Mary, with whom the young couple had taken up their quarters. And William Ames was an easy-going, good-tempered man, whom Penelope rather liked, although, secretly, she despised him a little for giving way to his wife in everything. Now, between Mrs. Ames and Penelope there was very little love lost.

In former days, when Tom was a bachelor, in his sailor-like, free-hearted way he had been very generous to his sister and her household. Coming home from foreign service with three or four years' pay to draw, and finding his sister Mary a good deal behindhand and overburdened with a lot of young children, Tom had come to the rescue with his spare cash. The youngsters had all been re-clothed in the smartest sailor-suits, whose melancholy remains still clung about the youngest of the family, and the little shop, whose profits were supposed to eke out the wages of the dockyardsmen, was put on a more satisfactory footing.

Tom had no thought of marrying at this time; "a sailor's wife should be his ship," he used to say; besides, as a proud and

rather sensitive young fellow, he was not attracted by the young women who are to be found among the resorts of seamen. And then, one day, having taken a letter from his captain to the port-admiral, he had seen Penelope, who was the orphan daughter of an old quartermaster who had long served with Admiral Blake.

Now, Penelope had been brought up in the Admiral's family, a friend and companion rather than a mere servant, and Tom really thought that she was one of the ladies of the house when he handed her his despatch. But Penelope placed herself on a proper footing with him so prettily and gracefully, and was so kind and pleasant, that Tom fell over head and ears in love at this first interview; while so handsome and genteel was Tom in his smart dress, and with his dark, expressive eyes, that Penelope could think of nothing else but his good looks till she saw him again.

Very soon Penelope demurely apprised the Admiral that she was going to be married; upon which her master flew into a great rage. Of all ungrateful and thankless hussies he declared Penelope to be the worst. She had grown essential to his comfort, had come to know all his ways, and now, after all the trouble of bringing her up, she would abandon the family to marry a seaman. Lady Blake and the girls were more reasonable, but they were sadly grieved to lose a girl who could make and alter dresses so nicely, and was always useful without being presuming.

The Admiral did not relent; he could be generous enough to those immediately about him; but when it came to deserting the ship, as he termed it, he had no forgiveness for the culprit. In his position he might have helped the young couple by pushing Tom along the thorny road of promotion, or have got him some appointment that would keep him ashore. But no; he took no more notice of Penelope, and meeting her one day, soon after her marriage, he looked sternly over her head and passed on.

But in spite of all this Penelope had been happy enough, for it was so much to feel that she had somebody to care for her, somebody whose life was wrapped up in hers, for Tom was almost foolish in his adoration of his little wife. And they had a pleasant room all to themselves at Mrs. Ames's house—an upper room, from which they had a glimpse of the harbour and dockyards, and the broad river with its busy traffic. Tom had told her, in the

last days they were together, that he should picture her to himself sitting in that little room, and watching for the ships as they rounded the headland, and that one day she would see the Terrible poking her black nose round the corner, and would hurry off to the wharf to welcome him home. But in this matter Tom had reckoned without his sister; for as Penelope and Mr. Ames reached the little house in Trueblue Street—they were all little houses at Chatness, many of them wooden and weatherboarded, but too insignificant to be picturesque; well, behold over the door was a big card, "Lodgings to let with a full view of the sea."

"Hallo!" cried Mr. Ames, "Mary's been sharp!" And, indeed, on reaching her old room Penelope found all her things cleared away, and the room in that state of rigid discomfort which showed that it was prepared for visitors. And on the stairs was Sister Mary herself, ready to do battle, for it could never be said that she shrank from the combat. There was her least defect. But Penelope did not feel equal to the occasion, but terribly sad and lonely, and only anxious to hide herself somewhere to give way to her grief.

"Yes, Mrs. Brettle," began the other, "I've had your things put in the top room, seeing as I can't afford to stand out of my letting any longer for the best room."

Now, Tom's notion had been that, in consideration of the money his sister had received from him at various times, amounting to fifty pounds or so, she would keep that room for his wife till other arrangements could be made. And when Tom had suggested this to his sister, she had appeared to acquiesce. And now the moment that Tom was out of the way, this was how she treated her guest. For the upstairs room was a miserable garret under the tiles, reached by a step-ladder. However, Penelope gallantly climbed her ladder and hid herself in the little cock-loft, and did not appear any more to human eyes that day.

But next morning Penelope was able to face the situation. She had felt from the first that her position with the Ames family was quite untenable. It had cheered Tom's last moments on shore to be persuaded that his wife's immediate future was provided for. But with poor, struggling people like the Ames family, it was hardly likely that they would care to keep an unprofitable lodger, even to cancel a long-forgotten debt. And if Tom's fifty pounds

had ever been put into the business, it certainly was not there now. Indeed, the business seemed to Penelope to be little more than the ghost of one. When there was a customer in the shop, Mrs. Ames would be chasing her children. When these last were unable to go to school by reason of their ragged garments, "How can I mend their things when there is that shop always to be attended to?" Mrs. Ames would demand in an aggrieved manner.

And yet to set up for herself on the small monthly pittance that came from her husband's pay, Penelope felt would be a dangerous experiment. What kind of people would she be thrown amongst in her poverty among the cheap lodging-houses of a seaport town? Her innate delicacy of mind recoiled from such contact, and yet what better prospect was there before her? But, anyhow, the cock-loft with the accompaniment of Sister Mary's constant reproaches would soon be unendurable. And then what could Penelope do?

The day was fine, and to avoid Mrs. Ames's tongue and the deafening noise and quarrels of the children, Penelope made her way to the beach—there is a seashore at Chatness, a narrow strip between a fort and a sea-wall, where shells are sometimes picked up, that may possibly have been washed ashore from the ocean, or may be simply the shells of periwinkles cast overboard by steamboat excursionists. Anyhow, there is the beach, with its half-dozen bathing-machines, its row of benches, and its wooden shanty called the bazaar, which does a fitful trade in buckets and spades for small people. But beyond the little strip of beach, there is a long range of sandy dunes covered with wiry vegetation; and here the Naval Brigade had set up targets, and the sailors from the ships in port were marched down to practise with carbine or rifle.

The sound of firing in that direction attracted Penelope's attention, and she wandered on, hoping to see some of the blue-jackets, with whom she felt as among her own clan. She came upon the firing-party rather suddenly, the men lying down concealed by some low hillocks, and waiting for some adjustment of the targets; while the naval lieutenant in charge reclined indolently against some sand-bags screened off in a little nook where the targets were visible, but not the men below—while he smoked a cigarette and read a novel.

But next moment cigarette and novel were thrown aside.

"My dear old Penny!" cried the young officer, and in the enthusiasm of the moment he put his arm round the young woman's waist and kissed her.

"You should not do that, Mr. Paul," said Penelope with a glance of dignified reproach. "You are getting beyond such childish things now, you know."

But Paul Blake, the Admiral's son, be it known, and an old playfellow of Penelope's, did not take much notice of her new and dignified manner.

"My dear Penny," he cried, "the sight of you makes me young again. Come, let me be a child once more."

"Ah, Mr. Paul," rejoined Penelope, turning away from him, "if you knew what trouble I am in, you would not be so unfeeling."

Lieutenant Blake, seeing that his old friend was really in trouble, was serious in a moment. What had happened? Her husband gone away on active service? Oh, how he envied him! Here he was losing his time at home because his mother was too nervous to be left alone, for the Admiral had gone away that very day. He had obtained a command in the Mediterranean; but his wife had only permitted him to accept it on condition that Paul should be left her.

"But, oh," cried Paul, "if you would go back to her, Penny, I am sure she would not mind being left."

"Oh, I couldn't," said Penelope proudly, "after what the master said, and his never taking the least notice of me; and then I am sure he would be dreadfully angry."

"He need never know!" cried Paul. "Oh, come back to-night with me, Penelope dear, and you'll fill poor mother's heart with joy. You know how ill she has been, delirious at times, and then she would call out for you; and she was very good to you, Penny."

Yes, that was true; Lady Blake had been very good to her, Penelope acknowledged, and was more than three-parts persuaded to go back. Indeed, before the targets were arranged, and the seamen had begun to fire, she had promised to meet young Blake at the station, and go back with him to her old place. Only she must keep it from Tom, because he would be dreadfully hurt at the thought of his wife going into service again.

"Well, I am going to leave you, Mary,"

said Penelope when she got back to Mrs. Ames's house. "I can see you don't want me, and so I've made up my mind to earn my own living."

Mrs. Ames was a good deal put out at this intimation. Her brother would indeed be angry if he heard that his wife had been driven away from her home.

"Well," she rejoined tentatively, "you'll have fine tales to tell Tom about me, I suppose?"

"Not unless you want me to, Mary," replied Penelope, who here saw a capital chance of arranging matters as she wished. "I don't want to bother Tom with our falling out. Why should he know anything about it?"

"Ah, why!" said Mrs. Ames, who here saw a course open to her that could not possibly harm her, and might prove to her advantage. "I'm not such a scribe that I should be writing off to tell him this and the other."

And thus it was agreed between the two women that nothing at all should be written to Tom on the subject. But Mrs. Ames was very curious as to Penelope's future plans, about which Penelope gave her very little enlightenment. But that same afternoon Penelope drove off with all her belongings, and Mrs. Ames dispatched her eldest boy with instructions to keep his eye on Aunt Penelope till the train went off, but without letting her see him.

"And, mother," reported the boy on his return, "she was met by a young swell—an officer he looked like. And he was awfully kind to her; and he put her into the train, and went off by it himself, only he went first, and she went third."

"I expect that was a blind," said Mrs. Ames, repeating the story to her husband that night. But she was very well content to be relieved of her unprofitable inmate.

The Terrible had a boisterous run across the Bay of Biscay, cutting through the cold Atlantic billows, and then after basking in the sunshine for a day or two at Gibraltar, she ran on to Malta, where orders awaited her to join the squadron in Egyptian waters. At Malta Tom found a letter from his wife, not saying much about herself, except that she was well and happy, but with some loving words that sent Tom about his duties with a light heart. But after that he did not get a letter for nearly a month, while the Terrible was still lying at Alexandria, and something low-spirited in the tone of

the letter made Tom vaguely uneasy. All the voyage out Tom had mooned a good deal, and indulged in more sentiment than you might have expected. In his watches at night, as the moon shone splendidly over the placid Mediterranean, Tom had fancied he could see his little wife sitting at her window and watching the same moonbeams silvering the wide roadstead of Chatness, and thinking of him who was away over the wide sea. And now that there was a certain amount of liberty ashore, Tom hardly cared to take advantage of it. Messmates who had remembered Tom in other days, the laughing, reckless, impetuous seaman, declared that he was bewitched. And so he was—under the spell of a woman, and quite helpless in the matter. But the passion which had hitherto been a source of pure, unmixed delight, now began to torment him. How could he expect that this girl, young, pretty, and so much superior to him, and who had known him but a short time after all—how could he expect her to go on remembering him always, and keeping faithful to the memory? He had not the art to express all he felt in writing, but he sent his wife a homely, touching letter, begging her not to forget him, or to let her thoughts of him grow cold for want of some visible token of his love. And Penelope's next letter was written in a more cheerful strain. He was not to think any nonsense about her forgetting him. But as it cost money for postage, he was not to grumble if letters were few and far between.

Tom tried to believe that everything was as it should be; and then he had not much time for evil forebodings. All of a sudden there had been an access of activity both afloat and ashore; signals were constantly exchanged between the half-dozen men-of-war; boats went to and fro; stores were landed and embarked; and of all this work Tom had his full share, and perhaps more. Once or twice he had seen Admiral Blake, who was now on the station, but he did not suppose that the Admiral noticed him; if he did, he made no sign.

But after the Terrible had been lying at Alexandria for some months, with only an occasional short cruise to relieve the monotony of existence, one of her lieutenants was invalided home, and the vacancy on her books was filled up by the appointment of Lieutenant Paul Blake. Tom did not attach much importance to the event. At one time, indeed, during the period of his courtship of Penelope, Tom had been

madly jealous of Paul, on account of his easy, affectionate manner to Tom's sweet-heart. But all that had passed over; neither Penelope nor he were likely to have anything to do with the Blakes again, and Tom rather avoided the young officer, although the latter took every opportunity of showing a friendly disposition.

Then Tom's watch was changed, and he fell into Lieutenant Blake's, and the very first night they were on duty together, Blake sent for Tom to speak to him on the quarter-deck. Tom followed the messenger rather reluctantly. He thought that Mr. Blake intended to make some enquiries after Penelope, and Tom had received no letter for six weeks now, and was becoming horribly uneasy. But he did not intend to let Mr. Blake see anything of this. He would reply, to any enquiries, that Penelope was all right, and that he had heard from her by the last mail.

As it happened, however, Lieutenant Blake did not ask any questions. He seemed rather embarrassed, stammered and coloured, for, with the best intentions, Lieutenant Blake was puzzled what to say. He was forbidden to say that Penelope was with his mother, and yet he wanted to encourage Tom, whose gloomy, preoccupied looks he had taken notice of more than once.

"Oh, Brettle," said Blake at last, after an awkward pause, during which Tom stood silent and respectful in manner before his officer. "Ah, I saw your wife not long before I left home. She was looking very well—prettier than ever, I think—and she sent her love to you."

Tom received the information gloomily enough. How should his wife have come to have aught to say to one of the Blakes? he wondered. But he was not in a position to cross-examine his officer about the matter.

"Is there anything else, sir?" he asked coldly enough; and Blake, who was a generous young fellow, and knew that, as far as he and the majority of sailors were concerned, gloom of countenance generally proceeded from empty pockets, thought he would cheer Tom up a little.

"Well, yes, Brettle," said the lieutenant in reply to Tom's question, drawing his purse from his pocket; "she has sent you a little money, just a trifle—a couple of sovereigns."

Tom's face suddenly lighted up with a glare of rage, but he repressed his emotion with a strong effort.

"My wife has sent me money!" he

repeated slowly, in a constrained voice; "a trifle of a couple of sovereigns! Sovereigns are not a trifle to sailors and their honest wives. Why, sir, she keeps me without news of her for weeks, to save a few pence. There must be some mistake."

Lieutenant Blake saw that he had made a mistake, but did not mend matters in his efforts to explain that the money was a present Penelope had received, that she wished to share with her husband. Tom firmly refused to touch the money, put his hands behind him when the lieutenant tried to force it upon him, so that the sovereigns fell, and rolled about the deck.

Lieutenant Blake stamped with indignation, as he called one of the ship's boys to pick up the money; and he dismissed Tom with a haughty wave of the hand.

And yet, with all his jealous fears, Tom had, in his heart, no real suspicion of his wife. It was strange she had never mentioned meeting Lieutenant Blake. If he could only have had a reassuring, explanatory letter! But none came; not a scrap of paper or a line to tell him of Penelope's welfare. Tom was almost out of his mind with fear and suspense, and even thought of deserting and concealing himself on board some steamer bound for England, that he might satisfy himself as to what had happened to Penelope.

But at this juncture the Terrible was ordered into the Red Sea, after embarking a strong force of marines. It was expected there would be fighting, and the whole ship was in a buzz of pleased excitement. Tom felt he could not run away then. When the Terrible had disembarked her marines at Suakim, a certain number of seamen were called for to do duty on shore, and Tom eagerly volunteered to be of the number. But his captain would not let him go. Lieutenant Blake went in charge of the party; and presently news came to the ship of a big fight in the desert, in which the Arab hordes had been almost destroyed.

Tom was sadly disappointed to think that the fighting was all over now, and that probably the Terrible would go back to her dull, monotonous duty at Alexandria without a chance of seeing more service. But things turned out differently as it happened. For one day the captain sent for Tom, and told him that he, the captain, had been placed in command of a naval brigade to co-operate with the troops on shore; and that he wanted to take some of his best men. Tom would go, of course.

And it was at his captain's right hand that Tom marched across the hills towards Osman Digna's camp. And when the troops halted for the night, Tom shared the captain's frugal meal of biscuits and preserved meat as they lay sheltered on the ground, while the rattle of distant musketry sounded in their ears.

As for what might happen on the morrow, Tom felt utterly reckless and careless. It would be a mercy, he thought, if he were knocked on the head, and an end put to all the doubts and troubles that beset him. Blake lay near him, stretched on the same hard couch of Mother Earth; but the two did not exchange a word. "A sullen brute," was Blake's thought of Tom; while Tom, on his part, was full of dark suspicions of the lieutenant.

The night wore on without any striking incident, and then at the first blush of dawn the troops were under arms. There was a strange, overpowering excitement about the march, with horsemen galloping about, and everybody on the look-out for the enemy. As generally happens in such cases, they came at a moment when they were not quite expected. There was a shout from those in front, and then the open ground was covered with a mass of dark forms rushing upon them. It was difficult to tell what happened just then, but in the end Tom found himself in a crush and press of men, something like the crowd that is trying to get into the pit of a theatre—only in this case the crowd were digging into each other with spears, bayonets, butt-ends of rifles, cutlasses, or anything that came to hand in the moment. The sailors, however, were forced back by sheer pressure of numbers. Tom lost sight of his captain, who had been hitting out right and left at the savages with the instinct of a practised bruiser; and then he found himself lying on the ground, but unhurt, while in front of him were scattered groups, struggling and falling. On the ground, near one of the Gatling guns which the sailors had been driven from, lay a naval officer, apparently wounded and insensible, while a couple of Arabs, with their murderous spears, were making in his direction with the evident intention of putting an end to him. Tom sprang to his feet and rushed at the Arabs, dealing one of them a blow with his carbine that brought him to the ground. Next moment, Tom saw his captain by his side, who dealt the other savage a tremendous left-hander that stretched him senseless beside his

companion. And then Tom saw that the wounded officer was Lieutenant Blake.

"Catch hold of the other end of him," cried the captain, "and we'll run him into the square."

And Tom grasped the lieutenant by the upper part of his uniform, when a letter tumbled out of his pocket.

In all the turmoil and confusion of the time, the sight of that letter seemed to burn itself into Tom's brain; for there was Penelope's handwriting plainly to be read on the address, "Lieutenant Paul Blake, R.N."—that handwriting for a sight of which he had been hungering for so long.

"Look out, Tom!" cried the captain, seeing a rush of savages coming in their direction.

Tom let go the lieutenant's head and turned upon the foe.

"Come on, you beggars!" he cried, willing to die rather than live under such torture.

And next moment he was rolling on the ground, transfixed by a spear.

Tom was not killed, after all, but had a narrow shave for it. But although he did not die, neither did he get well. Fever came on, and the wound refused to heal. Tom had not strength to rally, and the doctors, to give him a chance, ordered him home, thinking the voyage would either kill or cure him. But it did neither. Tom was landed at Chatness and carried on a stretcher to the hospital, more dead than alive. None of his friends knew of his coming, so there was nobody to visit him. But before long it was found that Tom was a Chatness man, and a note was sent to Mrs. Ames, who lost no time in coming to see her brother.

All through that troubled time of pain and delirium, one tormenting trouble, which he could not define or bring to any form or shape, weighed upon him like an ugly nightmare. Tom had talked and raved incessantly about Penelope, sometimes adjuring her in the most loving terms, at others full of menace and reproach. But in his lucid moments he was altogether silent and morose, trying to fit things together in his fevered brain, and make out what was really the trouble that overwhelmed him.

But when Tom saw his sister sitting by his bedside he had the clue; everything came back to him in a moment.

"Where is she?" he cried, struggling to sit up. Mrs. Ames shook her head in a most dolorous manner.

"I really don't know nothing about her, Tom," was Mrs. Ames's raven-like strain. "The moment you was out of port she left me, and where she's been since I don't wish to know. She never came near me, not except once a month when she came to draw your pay. Then she'd look in as bold as brass—'Just come over for Tom's money,' she'd say. 'Oh, are you?' said I, just like that. I never said more than that—it wasn't my place, you know."

Tom groaned a sad, hopeless sigh.

"Well, it's all over with me, Mary. I sha'n't get over this."

Mrs. Ames sighed dolefully. She could not gainsay him. Tom looked so worn and grey, that she felt sure his last hour had come.

"You'll tell her," faltered Tom; "tell her I loved her to the last, and wouldn't have lived any longer if I could."

"Oh yes, I'll tell her," said Mrs. Ames. "But your bits of things, Tom—your kit, and all that, and what bit of money there might be due. You wouldn't like her to have that, dear?"

"Oh yes, I should," rejoined Tom; "she has had all of me—body and soul—and she may have that as well."

After that Tom fell into a deep sleep, and his sister stole gently away. She thought there would be no harm in having a little paper drawn up for him to sign, for he wouldn't in his calm senses think of leaving what he had to that woman.

When Tom woke again, he felt somehow revived and refreshed; his pillow was smooth and comfortable; there was a soft perfume of delicate flowers, and a cool, soft hand parted the locks on his forehead. Tom opened his eyes in a gentle delirium of delight. There sat Penelope by his side, looking brighter and prettier than ever, and with a look of love and pity on her face that seemed to Tom quite angelic.

Tom feebly opened his arms.

"One word," said Penelope, laying her face against his; "I have heard what your sister Mary has said of me. Do you believe it?"

"No," cried Tom fervently. "By Heaven, I don't!"

After that embrace, Tom's face clouded again.

"But you might have written to me, Penny," he whispered; "never a line nor a word."

"I did write to you, Tom," said Penelope, "two long letters, telling you all I was doing, for I would not keep you in the

dark any longer. But I sent them under cover to Lieutenant Blake to save postage."

Tom muttered something disrespectful about postage. Penelope laughed.

"Dear Tom," she said demurely, "you are getting quite your old self again."

"I shall never be that, Penny," said Tom. "No, Penny, I feel I am going to die, and I am glad of it. Yes, for I should never be fit for service again, and I should only drag you down into poverty. No, don't pray for me to get better, Penny; pray that I may die now, happy in your arms."

"Nonsense, Tom!" cried Penelope; "you're not going to die. The doctor told me just now that he was sure it was some trouble on your mind that was keeping you back; and now you have got me, Tom, you will be all right. And look here, even if you are not fit for service, we shall not starve. You say I'm stingy, Tom, about postages, and so on, but for whose sake is it, I should like to know. Now here's a little book, Tom, I've kept since you have been away. Every month, you see, here's a month's wages that I got from Lady Blake, and every month, too, your month's pay. And the two together, and with interest, what do they come to?—a little over fifty pounds, you see, and we can have our own little home, Tom."

Tom actually sat up in bed and shouted, "I shall get better now."

But here the hospital-orderly interfered, and bade Tom lie still, or he would fetch the assistant-surgeon to him.

However, there is no doubt that Tom did get better—in fact, recovered so completely that he was able to remain in the service, gaining promotion for his gallantry, and the rank of a warrant-officer. And Penelope has her pretty little cottage in the environs of Chatness, and lets lodgings in the summer-time to visitors; and anyone would be lucky who chanced to take up his quarters with her and her husband, even though the shore at Chatness is not unlimited, and the sandy dunes not particularly inviting.

AN EASTER VACATION.

By MARY SEYMOUR.

I.

It is probable that few sufferers from an accident could give any clear idea as to the exact nature of the misfortune which befell them. Certainly, Gilbert Drayton, when he was knocked down and run over in the

neighbourhood of the London Docks, was unconscious of anything but a sudden shock, which roused him from his reverie, and then robbed him of all power of thought before he had time to wonder as to its cause.

The driver of the van, who clambered off his perch with dismay and anxiety in his face, was quite unable to guess how the collision came about. Of one point only was he certain—he had not been asleep, a statement which the police received with an incredulity they did not consider it necessary to conceal. But protestations, explanations, and contemptuous silence were alike unheeded by the victim, around whose motionless form a crowd soon gathered.

A dim sensation of blue overhead and around him slowly crept in upon Gilbert's consciousness. He was swimming in the sea, which had closed over his head, and shut him in at a great depth. As he struggled to the surface, he gradually became aware that the blue of the ocean was broken here and there by patches of white, at which he gazed dreamily, until a sudden sharp pang aroused him to a full consciousness that he was looking at the blue-checked curtains and canopy of a bed.

"There! that is all right!" he heard; and before he could protest alike against the sentiment and the tone in which it was uttered, he became unconscious again, and nurse and surgeon were uninterrupted in their work and their sense of satisfaction.

As soon as Mr. Drayton recovered himself sufficiently to consider his position, two dominant ideas kept recurring to his mind, the first being that he had shown considerable folly in leaving the safe end of town merely to see off a friend who was sailing for Australia. The second thought, which was a more satisfactory one, and had even a flavour of self-congratulation about it, was that if he was fated to be laid up in an East End hospital, he could not have chosen a more convenient time than the Easter vacation, when everyone was out of London.

"Thank you, I want nobody," he had replied to the surgeon's offer of sending for a friend. "I have plenty to see and to interest me here. In fact, instead of apologising for having no private room you can offer me, you ought to congratulate me on the fact."

As may be imagined, it was some time

before the patient was able to make so long and so rational a speech. There were weary hours of pain when he lay in a half-stupor, and even more suffering nights when he moved his head half deliriously to and fro, intent on finding the square root of eighty-three, or constructing an island in the Mediterranean out of three unequal-sized pieces of stick.

He could never tell at what point of his recovery, whether in real delirium or in a broken dream, that he first began to associate ease from pain, and a pervading sense of happiness with the presence of the sister in charge of the ward.

At first he attributed his longing for her to a desire for a drink of water or a rearrangement of his pillows; but as the fever left him and he could think clearly, he constructed a fanciful theory that she exercised a subtle mesmeric influence over him, and he used to long for her coming in order to test the existence of the power he suspected.

She was by no means the ideal nurse of fiction—a pale, fragile girl, with large dark eyes and delicate, wasted hands—on the contrary, Sister Mansell was a tall, well-grown woman of thirty, with a pair of rosy cheeks, which reminded her patients of the pleasant country, and a smile which made sick men and women feel as if life were something worth struggling for, after all. The grey gown fitted her badly, Gilbert soon noticed, and her cap was hideously ugly. He thought it all the uglier because it hid a quantity of brown hair, which was plaited closely away, as if its owner's only care was to put it out of sight. Plentiful as it was, Gilbert once saw two grey hairs on one side of the narrow parting as she bent down to pick up something he had dropped, and he took a malicious pleasure in noticing them and looking for them again. After all, she had not the secret of perpetual youth amidst the suffering and anguish around her. His mind revolted from the idea of such unfairness, and he consoled himself by thinking that she, too, would grow old, and that they two—he and she—would be equals some day. She was only five years his junior now, but he knew in his heart, as he watched her passing to and fro with her quick step and bright eyes, that no lapse of years could ever bring them to a level. It was a pleasure to see her move, and every day as he watched her he became convinced more firmly than before that there were deeper truths in mesmerism than he

had ever believed possible, for he was restless and miserable until she came, whilst her presence gave him calm and contentment.

But after a time he found the magic fail, for as he improved in health, and every day brought fresh cases, and too often serious ones, into the ward, the sister lingered longer and oftener by other beds than by his; and as he waited with all a sick man's impatience for her coming, he became more critical than before as to the fit of her dress and the set of her cap, although all the old sense of healing returned for a time when she stood by his side, and he could surreptitiously take hold of a fold of her grey gown.

There were about thirty beds in the ward—Gilbert counted them once, and then calculated to an exact fraction the portion of Sister Mansell's time that fell to his share. Like a usurer exacting his dues, he watched the minutes she gave him, and raged inwardly when she deprived him of his just amount. At last—it must be remembered that he was still very ill—he hit upon a happy expedient for detaining her; he obstinately refused to allow her to carry out the surgeon's directions. She looked at him a little anxiously to see whether he were feverish, laid her hand an instant on his pulse, and then finding the result of her investigations satisfactory, began to coax him to be good. But he would not be persuaded, possibly he could not be, for it is strange how soon in illness a scheme of action begun voluntarily passes beyond control; and, perceiving that he had reached this stage, she left him to attend to her other patients.

It only needed a few minutes of silence and want of opposition to convince him of the nature of his conduct, and when the sister returned, he not only submitted to her wishes, but apologised for the trouble he had caused her.

"Oh, it did not matter," she made reply; "only it seems a pity to waste any time."

Waste any time! He had not delayed her five minutes. Why, he knew dozens of men, and of women too, to whom minutes and hours were too often burdens which seemed intolerable. She had not intended to do more than utter the barest truism by her statement, but no sermon ever sunk into Gilbert's heart as did those simple words. What had he done with his time—with six-and-thirty years of life? That question recurred to him over

and over again as he lay silent and motionless during the long hours of convalescence. That absence of active wrongdoing, which constitutes the sole claim to a merciful judgment of some lives, seems to lose its potency when brought into contact with the active principle of good which animates others.

"I am afraid you must find these Sunday afternoons very tiresome," said Sister Mansell, coming up to him as she saw the puzzled, anxious look upon his face. He was only revolving the question of the difference between his life and hers, but she thought he was in pain.

He smiled for answer, hoping to detain her a little longer; he knew that she could only stay a minute, for the ward was full of the patients' friends, and the nurse in charge had to answer innumerable enquiries, to say nothing of keeping a careful watch upon the visitors, who, in a spirit of cruel kindness, would smuggle in all kinds of forbidden luxuries.

"No, indeed," he answered at last; "I have so much to see and to hear; perhaps the room is a little close, but there is a great deal of reality here."

She hardly understood him, for life had never been anything but real to her, but she was glad that he was contented. The situation did not seem a very happy one. On his left a woman was relating volubly to a convalescent how her youngest son had made her flesh creep by falling into the water-butt, whilst on his right a young wife was sitting as silent and almost as motionless as the figure on the bed which she was watching with eyes full of her unspoken anguish.

"Can one do anything to help?" asked Gilbert suddenly, remembering with a pang of remorse how often he had grudged the hours which Sister Mansell had given to his neighbour.

"Do you mean by giving money? Oh no," was the answer; "but I cannot help hoping still."

She left him and went up to the silent watcher. Gilbert could not hear what she said; but he could see the look on her face, which, reflected back from the other, seemed to brighten it like a ray of sunshine. It was as if Hope itself, in a grey gown and a large apron, had descended into the ward.

"She's a right good sort," said one of the convalescent patients, when, the visitors being gone, he hobbled to the side of Gilbert's bed; "and she's got pluck enough for anything. Why, there was a poor

crittur, mad from drink, got away from the nurse and p'liceman who was watching him upstairs—it must ha' been just before you come in—and he come screaming through the ward with a poker in his hand; it was two o'clock in the morning, and the night-nurse, she give one shriek and was off before you could say Jack Robinson, but the sister, she was in the ward just as soon, and she walked up to him as he stood in yonder corner a-muttering and a-cussing awful. She walked right up to him, spoke to him very gentle-like, and took the poker out of 'is 'and, and when the p'liceman came in, the poor crittur was as quiet as a lamb. I can tell you the bobby looked small."

The narrator laughed as he remembered the discomfiture of the policeman; possibly he had his own reasons for viewing the individual and the race with distrust. But Gilbert was not thinking of the speaker; everything he heard and saw of the sister made him wonder more and more whether she was an ordinary specimen of a class which he had never before met, or whether she was as distinct from all other members of her profession as she was from every woman he had ever known.

It was a perfect day of May, the sun was as warm and bright as if it were July, only out in the fields and on the river-reaches the trees and bushes were full of that sweet promise which July forgets, or only fulfils in part. In East London, only the heat of the sun and the chill of the wind mark the changes of the season, and St. Nicholas is not lucky enough to be a fashionable hospital patronised by royalty, and gay throughout the year with gifts of flowers.

"It is a lovely day, is it not?" said the sister as she paused by Gilbert for a few moments; he was nearly well, and did not need her for longer now. "It makes one think how lovely the wild hyacinths must be in the country."

It was the first semblance of a personal feeling she had ever expressed, and even in that she did not utter a wish. Gilbert thought with a pang how much joy those flowers, which were blooming round his country home, might bring to lives barren of colour and sweetness, and as soon as he was allowed paper and ink, he wrote home directions which were to be immediately carried out. When the basket arrived, he would not unpack it himself, but waiting for a spare moment of the sister's time, told her the contents were for her. He emphasised the pronoun, but he might

have spared himself the trouble, for she made them all—hyacinths, wood anemones, late primroses, golden cowslips—common property at once. The whole ward was bright and sweet with the woodland spoils, and everyone had a little special nosegay to admire—everyone except the sister.

"You have got none for yourself," said Gilbert with the privileged petulance of a sick man. "I want you to have one."

She gratified his whim, and fastened a bunch of flowers in her buttonhole, but next time he saw her they were gone. One of the servants had admired the nosegay, and the wearer had given it away at once. There are natures like that, which cannot have or know any sweet or precious thing without giving it away, careless of what they themselves may lose.

The last day of Gilbert's stay came; most people about him had wondered at the patience with which he had borne his detention, but he felt himself that the time had been all too short for him to learn half the lessons which might have made him a different man.

"And to-morrow you will be at the sea," said the sister, smiling kindly at him as he murmured some broken words of thanks. "Oh," with a great sigh, "how I wish they were all going!"

It was the only wish he had ever heard her express.

Two days later the secretary of St. Nicholas received a large donation to the funds of the hospital, and a cheque, the proceeds of which were to be employed in sending the inmates of the Mansell Ward to the seaside.

So the two lives met, touched, and parted.

II.

August was nearly over—an August which had been the hottest month of a hot summer. London was intolerable, so all the world agreed, but Gilbert was surprised to see how many people were not only enduring but enjoying London. The sun had already set, and in the twilight men and women were lounging in their doorways, or chatting in the streets, whilst energetic children were dancing to the strains of a barrel-organ. There was a faint, half-baked odour from the walls of the houses, varied not agreeably by the smell of fried fish. Two small urchins were revelling in the delights of watching a woman cutting ham at a cook-shop, but

they were soon aroused by Gilbert's enquiry for St. Nicholas.

"I can show it yer," cried the smallest. "You mean the ospital? I've seen ladies holding little kids in red shirts at the winder."

He proved a faithful guide, and led Gilbert to the iron gates, where a stern porter enquired his business as closely as if the wards of St. Nicholas were a second Paradise, from which Mr. Drayton had been expelled, and to which he desired re-admittance.

Whilst he was speaking a female figure glided in at the gate. In the dim twilight, with her long cloak and dark veil, the sister looked almost ghost-like, but her voice was as cheerful as of yore:

"Mr. Drayton, have you come back to see us? That is good of you. Come in with me now."

He did not answer, for he could not speak. Quite suddenly, at the sound of her voice and the touch of her hand, all his mysterious longing to get back to London, the irresistible influence which had led him on the evening of his arrival to the East End and to St. Nicholas, were clear to him. He followed her with a dim sense of rebellion against the injustice which during three months—months when he had been wearying for her presence and thinking of her hourly—had made her work on unconscious of his feelings, forgetful of his very existence.

She led him through the long corridor and into her little room beside the ward. Then, when she had lighted a candle, she turned and looked at him for the first time. Her quick survey told her all she needed to know: he was well, walked and moved freely, and looked happy and contented.

"That is good," she said, unconscious of his rebellion against the calmness of her look and words. "It is a great comfort to see you are really well again. Now sit down and tell me what you are doing."

He obeyed her and spoke easily of those superficial subjects which a man of the world can always discuss without putting strain on brain or heart, and while he spoke he looked at her with enquiring eyes, wondering whether or not his mind, now that he was strong and healthy again, could criticise her appearance coolly.

She was not beautiful—he resented the fact hotly, or rather he resented the world's probable statement of the fact—but surely never before had any face mirrored a soul so perfect and so serene.

"You are not changed," he said abruptly in the midst of an account he was giving of his adventures in Scotland, "and yet I suppose you have been working as hard as ever."

"Oh yes," she answered, smiling, quite unconscious of the stab she gave him by her speech; "my life has been just the same since you left as it was when you were here; there has been no change."

"And my next-door neighbour," he asked, speaking eagerly to cover his disappointment, "is he recovered now?"

"Ford? Oh, I am very glad you remember him. I wish you would see him; he is quite wonderful. Mr. Mackenzie is very proud of him, and his case has been in all the papers. We hope to send him to the seaside in a month. Oh, by the way," with a sudden light which made her eyes beautiful, "they never told me, but I could not help guessing that we owe the Mansell convalescent fund to you. We do, don't we? Ah, I thought so! I wish I could tell you how grateful we are."

He would have told her if he dared that every possession he had was hers, and that they were dear to him only because he could so lay them at her feet; but such words do not come lightly to the lips of a man nearly forty years of age. Besides, if he were to speak them, what could such speech do but startle and pain one whose life was complete without him, and had need neither of his help nor his love?

"Are you going?" she said, as he arose after a little further talk; "then I will show you the way to the station. I have to leave a parcel at the post-office—I forgot to take it with me when I went out, and that brought me back quickly. I am glad I came, or I should have missed you."

They walked side by side down the Whitechapel Road, which not even the imagination of a lover could convert into a paradise. Flaring gas-lamps shining on groups of shabby, tired men and women, busy about their Saturday night's marketing, cannot compare with the moonlight sleeping on a bank of violets; and yet by the alchemy of a true love, Gilbert managed to convert these surroundings into fresh reasons for devotion. Empty, barren, miserable, were many of these lives, but how much harder would the burden have been to some but for the woman at his side!

"May I come back and see you again?"

"Indeed, I shall be very glad. Few of our patients come back twice to see us—

some, of course, do—but most, after one visit, never return.”

“I am sorry to be one of so ungrateful a class.”

“Oh,” she made answer hurriedly, “you must not say that. I cannot bear to hear that word. I have never found such a thing as ingratitude, but I have often, very often, been oppressed by a thankfulness I had done nothing to deserve.”

Her voice dropped a little; certain tender memories filled her eyes with happy tears; and then she went on in her usual voice:

“Besides, you must remember that life is very busy for most of our patients, and old suffering and old memories get pushed on one side by the pressing needs of every day, and it is just as well. A fresh generation of sick people is always entering our walls—imagine what a crowd we should have if, added to these, we had all our old patients coming to see us!”

“Does that mean that I must not come?” he asked, half smiling—but only half, for his heart was profoundly sad.

“Nothing of the kind; you are more than a patient. I can never forget,” for one moment her voice thrilled him with a wild sense of joy, as he imagined which of the many happy hours, sacred to him, she would recall; “I can never forget how much some of them owe to you.”

If his castle fell with a sudden crash, it did not bury his dearest hopes in the ruins; he had never fancied that she loved him, but had only rejoiced in loving her—for long unconsciously.

“Oh yes, you must come back soon; there are very many who will be glad to see you, for you are an object of interest even to those who did not know you. The history of your accident and stay with us has become a tradition.”

“I shall come back again,” he said, trying to speak lightly, “if only to show you that some of your patients can never forget you. Are you going into this post-office? May I wait and see you home afterwards? It is very nearly dark.”

She shook her head and laughed.

“If it were quite dark there would be no occasion for you to take the trouble. People about here are very good-natured. Why, last winter, the cabman driving me home late one foggy night lost his way; I am afraid he was not quite sober, so as I was a little nervous, I put my head out of window, and asked a man standing near if he knew the way to St. Nicholas. Do you know that the man led the cab-horse all

the way to the hospital-gates, and never waited even to be thanked? His little girl had been in the children’s ward, he told me, and that was the reason why he saw me safe home. You must not—indeed, you must not think that my patients are ungrateful. I suppose here, as in all parts of the world, one might find some few who remembered only the unkindnesses and forgot the acts of kindness shown them; but here, as elsewhere, it would be the few and not the many who did so.”

She paused a little, surprised at her own eloquence; the words had hurried to her lips almost in her own despite, and when she spoke again it was in a different tone and with an altered manner:

“There, I must leave you. Thank you for coming back to see us. I do not know anything pleasanter than to see those who have been ill and helpless, walking about easily, erect, and happy.”

Gilbert did not protest that a man may be nearer happiness when he is a crippled, bedridden invalid, than when he stands strong and upright, but alone.

He only bade her good-bye, for although he was learning to understand her language, he knew that she had no key by which to interpret his.

III.

As may be guessed, Gilbert did not stay long in London after his pilgrimage to the East, and he hurried away upon a round of visits, and found each house more wearisome than the last, each circle of acquaintances more disappointingly shallow.

“You look bored, Mr. Drayton,” said an old friend to him one evening, “and it is not polite of you to show your feelings so plainly.”

“I am trying to cultivate a rustic savagery. I feel as if a little honest display of some real feeling, no matter what, would do everyone here good.”

“Suppose you choose some other feeling for display then,” she answered quickly. “Love, hate, anger, and jealousy are each and all more interesting than ennui.”

“Each of these feelings is already appropriated by some actor who mimics the reality more or less closely. What I want to reach is not the imitation of feeling, but the reality.”

“And by what right,” she said, closing her fan, and looking at him with a pair of intent, dark eyes, “do you conclude that all feeling is absent from people, who, for a few hours every day, agree to avoid dis-

plays of emotion? I am afraid you are a shallow observer, after all, Mr. Drayton, if you do not understand the depths of suffering and joy concealed under a calm or even a frivolous exterior."

"I dare say you are right," he replied with unwonted meekness. "But I was thinking of a life—of lives where there are no concealments and no pretences."

He could not rest until he was back again in that purer air, and one day in November found him again at the hospital-gate demanding admission. This time no silent, veiled figure glided through the twilight to his side; on the contrary, he had to make his way alone through the gas-lit passages, and up stone steps to the ward. When he came to the door he paused, his heart beating fast as it had not done for years; and he smiled at his own excitement as those past youth are apt to do whilst they watch and analyse their own feelings. He did not wait long before opening the door, and then he stood watching the familiar beds, the long tables decorated with a large bunch of chrysanthemums—his gardener had orders to keep the ward supplied with flowers—and the staff of nurses moving quietly about their work. There was no need for him to look closely, he knew by instinct, or by observation so quick as to seem intuition, that the sister was not one of them, but before he could turn to the door of the sister's room, a sudden, sharp voice startled him.

"What are you doing here?" exclaimed a short, bustling little woman in a sister's dress, who had bounded out of her room and asked her question without giving Gilbert time to become aware of her entry. "You have no business here, and must go away again."

"I beg your pardon, but I came here to see Sister Mansell."

"I am Sister Mansell," said the lady severely, with her heart, however, softened by Gilbert's manner and courteous tones, "and I don't know you."

Gilbert's sense of the ridiculous prevented him from expressing the most conventional regret at the loss he had sustained from the fact, and he limited himself to explaining the reason of his coming, and the object of his search. Even whilst he spoke he realised with a sudden heart-sickness how much might happen in three months, and how even perfect health might not protect its possessor against the fatigues and dangers of hospital-nursing.

"Sister Mansell! Oh, she is moved. She is down in the children's ward. Go along the corridor, down two flights of stairs, and then ask your way."

The gas was lighted in the children's ward, and the sister was superintending the children's tea. Some of them were in blissful enjoyment, some of them in eager anticipation, of their bread-and-butter. Some few were lying still in that patient silence which goes deeper to the watcher's heart than any moan of pain.

"Mr. Drayton, I am glad to see you." She put down the little convalescent she had in her arms, and held out her hand; the child clung shyly to the skirts of her gown as if unwilling to let her go. "How good it is of you to come and see us all! Popsy must be a good girl," she went on to the little child as she sat her in a high chair at the table, "and nurse will give her her tea. Now, Mr. Drayton, will you come into my room for a little; I have a few minutes to spare."

They were alone together for some moments before either spoke. Free as the sister was from all trace of self-consciousness, the silence embarrassed her a little, and she began to speak quickly.

"You see, I have moved my quarters, and you are the first of my old patients to find me out. I like this ward best of all, and it was quite a surprise to me when I was allowed to come back to it."

Still he said nothing. A faint suspicion, which the woman would not admit, forced its way into her mind as she looked at him, and saw his eyes earnest and resolute as her own.

"Did you have any difficulty in finding the ward?" she asked, in order to say something, and to force him to answer her.

"Yes, I have come back," he replied, with all the longing of the past months lending tenderness to his tones, hoarse with emotion. "I have come back to you because I cannot stay away."

She put up her hand suddenly.

"I hear someone calling me; I must go." Then she paused, her hand upon the door, and recovered her usual composure, her training helping her to subdue all signs of emotion. "Perhaps you would like to come round the ward with me."

If she had hoped to check his feeling for her by showing him how completely she was a nurse, and nothing more—and some such idea was in her mind—she failed as utterly as she deserved to do. For a man who loved her could have found no

more exquisite pleasure than he enjoyed in seeing the smiling faces grow happier, and the little sad drawn ones lose their look of pain, as she stopped by each bedside to smooth the children's hair and tell him some little story about the occupant. By one bed a policeman was sitting.

"That is an accident," she whispered. "The father has been here some time."

She went up to the cot. The man rose respectfully, and saluted. It would have needed a heart of stone not to be touched by the pathos of his stiff, military movement, contrasted with the quivering lips which could not form the question he strove to utter. Gilbert turned away his head, but the sister spoke with tones even more gentle than usual:

"See how well he is sleeping! He does not suffer now."

The father tried to thank her, but still the words would not come; only he looked at her, and, meeting that look, with its depth of anguish and gratitude, the sister could hardly force herself to give the smile of encouragement which was sometimes the hardest part of her duty.

"Will he get well?" asked Gilbert, as soon as they were alone again, and he had overcome his own inability to speak.

The sister shook her head.

"We must always hope whilst there is life; children rally wonderfully, and if we gave way we could not do our work."

"It must be very hard for you sometimes to see them die."

"Oh no," she made answer simply. "The hard thing sometimes is to see them live. I don't mean in a case like this, but where the children's parents are little better than thieves, or are even worse, you cannot tell how gladly one sees the little innocent ones shut their eyes upon a world which seems for them hopelessly full of sin."

"But when you love them it must be very hard to part with them."

"We have not much time for loving people here," she made answer with a smile; "we have too much to do for them."

She spoke the word simply, and without apparent intention; but when he looked at her, he could see her cheeks had grown a little paler, and her eyes had drooped upon the ground.

"But sometimes," he answered very slowly, and in broken tones, "the best thing you can do for them is to love them."

She did not contradict him. She sat

very still, and gave no sign either of assent or disagreement.

"Agatha," he went on in feverish haste, while even in her own pain she wondered how he had found out her name, "you know why I have come back to you. Are you going to send me away again?"

He stretched out his arms appealingly across the little table that divided them, careless that as he did so he upset a little basket of bandages, which rolled hither and thither across the floor. At the noise she looked up, and her eyes were wet with tears.

"I am afraid I must," she answered.

At her words his head fell forward upon his arms, and they sat silent together for some time, his face hidden, whilst the tears were rolling down her cheeks. Suddenly, with an effort, she set herself to collect the rolls of bandages, and to put them back neatly in their place. The occupation and movement gave her back her self-control, and touching him lightly upon the arm, she said, much as she had spoken to him in former days, when he was unreasonable and fretful from pain:

"I am deeply sorry to have grieved you. I never meant to do it. I am afraid I was selfish and self-absorbed, one is apt to grow so here; but you must try and forgive me for the harm I have done you." Then, as he did not answer, she went on: "I hope you will soon forget it. To people of our age," and she smiled a little, "life has so many other interests than are involved in—love."

The last word came out unwillingly. At the sound of it he looked up, his face pale and his brows drawn together.

"I should have said that myself a few months ago," he answered in a voice destitute of tone and emotion. "And if it were only love, I should get over it this time, I suppose, as men have done before; but I want you, Agatha, not only because I love you, but because your life might make mine better."

Something in his speech hurt her. She did not stop to think what it was that pained her, for she would have been unwilling to acknowledge the truth, and yet, woman like, she was wounded at the idea that he could "get over" his love for her, or, perhaps, rather that he should speak as one who had already laid aside other and earlier loves.

"Oh, don't say that!" she answered hurriedly. "So many people speak as if our life here was an ideal one, free from

all petty meannesses, and all small interests. Here, as everywhere, we give way to our worst feelings sometimes; here, as everywhere, there are temptations which it is difficult to resist. The life is no nobler with us than it is outside."

"I was not thinking of the life," he answered, "but of what you make of it, and how much you might do with mine. Still," in a firmer tone, "if it is not to be, do not let your last memory of me be a painful one. Agatha," taking both her hands, "I owe you more than I can ever tell you, or ever hope to pay. Look at me once, dear, and tell me that you will never think I regret what has happened. I shall try and be worthy of having loved you."

It was her tears only which fell when he stooped and kissed the hands that lay in his, and they fell still when he had left her alone.

IV.

No one observed any change in the sister for two or three days after Gilbert's visit, but about the end of the week the matron noticed how pale and worn-out she looked.

"I think I should like to go away for a little change," Agatha said, on being questioned. "I feel overworked."

It was the first time she had ever uttered such a confession, and it startled those who heard it, for it was spoken with a tremulous lip and moistened eye.

"You must go down to the country; rest and quiet will soon put you right again."

All Agatha had wished for was time to think, but when she found herself back in the country village where she had been born, the November days, short as they were, were all too long for her. She paced up and down the little garden of the house where she was lodging, going over the past again and again, and always with the same feeling of doubt, which grew into despair. Had she wronged the man who loved her? Could she have done anything but send him back without the gift he craved, when he demanded it so suddenly and so unexpectedly? She asked herself these questions so often, that it was inevitable that she should answer them in different ways, according to her mood. At last her strong common-sense came to her aid; she paused in her restless pacing to and fro.

"It is all over now; I can do nothing in

the matter, and I will not think of it again," so she summed up her conclusion. Four hours later she was back at her post, and no one had occasion to remark upon any change in her appearance. The work quieted her, but it cost her an effort she had never known before. She blamed herself for neglecting her duties, and spurred herself on to further exertions; only to find the strain heavier, and herself less able to endure it. At last, greatly to her own surprise, she sat down in her room, laid her head upon the table where Gilbert had hidden his face, and fainted quietly away. She was very apologetic for her conduct when she recovered consciousness, but she was unable to combat the decision that she must take a long rest, even though she foresaw the mental conflict which lay before her in the long idle hours of convalescence.

"I should not like to die before I have seen him again," she thought to herself in the first dreamy days of enforced quiet; but another and nobler motive woke into life with her returning strength: "I must try and live so as to be worthy of his high thought of me."

Gilbert, meantime, was fighting his own battle far away from her, and was by no means as victorious as he fancied himself. Often he imagined that he had trampled out memories, which mocked him by rising again with renewed life; but the memories he longed to destroy were the memories of certain hopes he had cherished, and were not any reminiscences of the woman he had loved. Every word she had spoken, every smile he had caught, every look of approval, were sacred; to her he owed every higher aspiration of his life, and he looked back upon the time they had passed together as the holiest season he had ever spent—as the period of self-dedication which should later on bear fruit. But he would never again trouble her calm by any word or look of his; there was no work he undertook, no help he gave, without some reference in his mind to her who had touched his spirit to finer issues. Yet he was resolved that he would not turn his footsteps to St. Nicholas until he could say to her: "See, the pain is over; but the joy of having once loved you will remain with me always."

It was summer again, grey, cloudy June, with little brightness or gladness in its leaden skies and cold winds; inside the children's ward, however, there was warmth and comfort—it was three o'clock, and the

little ones were taking their afternoon sleep, whilst one of the nurses was busy with her needlework. There was a murmur of voices from the sister's room, although the closed door shut in the sound of distinct words. The sister had visitors—a man and his wife, the man being no other than the John Ford who had lain so long motionless in the bed next Gilbert's.

The visit was not a great success, for after the sister had enquired after her old patient's health, and heard a little about his work and his children, conversation continued in a disconnected way, broken by frequent pauses. At last the couple rose to go, and when they had both shaken hands with their hostess, the wife said in an abrupt way, as if a sudden thought had struck her, and without betraying that these, her parting words, had been the main object of her visit:

"Oh, by-the-bye, sister, I wonder if you'd like this?" and as she spoke she pulled out of her pocket a photograph upon glass. "I waited to have it took until he should get back his looks again."

The picture was a cheap one in a tawdry frame, but it was easy to see that shillings were very scarce with those who had spared one for this little gift.

"I should like you to keep it," said the man gruffly, feeling it his duty to support his wife, and yet distrusting useless words, "just to show you didn't think I could ever forget."

"Thank you very much," said the sister with a smile as bright as of old. "I think it is an excellent likeness."

"His hair's grown again," said the wife eagerly; "I arranged it so as to hide the scar." As she spoke her voice trembled, and she put her hand lovingly on her husband's head—he had not risen from his seat. "It hardly shows at all." Then with a burst of genuine though noisy emotion: "If it had not been for you, the scar, and the hair, and the head, would have been deep down under the earth by now."

Her husband quieted her, and led her out of the room, but she ran back again to kiss the sister's hands, and to tell her that there never, never was so good a man as the one whose life she owed to St. Nicholas and to the woman whom she blessed from the bottom of her heart.

It was natural that the thought of Gilbert should recur to Agatha as soon as she was again alone, for he and Ford had been neighbours, and, besides, there had never been an expression of grateful feeling from her patients that the sister had not desired his presence to hear the words and to recognise the truth of what she had once told him of the deep and unmerited gratitude she had found on all sides.

But though he was in her thoughts, it was rather as a memory of the past than as one belonging to her present life, and when she looked up and saw him in the doorway, she started as if some sick man had risen from his bed of death, and stood before her.

For an instant they gazed at one another in solemn silence; when Agatha spoke, her tone was very low, but hurried and discomposed:

"I thought you never would come back again."

Gilbert Drayton's nature had not been a remarkable one, but this woman had brought out all that was highest and most generous in him. With a self-conquest which cost him more than any other effort of his life, he asked very quietly:

"Do you mean all that your words seem to say, or shall I go away again?"

She put out her hand to retain him, and he knew the truth, but there was none of the flush and joy of triumphant love about either of them. Both were very pale, as those who look for the first time on a terrible mystery.

Then Gilbert took her hand and knelt down before her, not in a lover's ecstasy, but in silent thankfulness for the best and most beautiful gift of his life.

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IMPORTANT FAMILY MEDICINE.

TRADE

NORTON'S

MARK.

CAMOMILE PILLS,

THE

MOST CERTAIN PRESERVER OF HEALTH,

A MILD, YET SPEEDY, SAFE, AND

EFFECTUAL AID IN CASES OF INDIGESTION

AND ALL STOMACH COMPLAINTS,

AND, AS A NATURAL CONSEQUENCE,

PURIFIER OF THE BLOOD AND SWEETENER OF THE WHOLE SYSTEM.

INDIGESTION is a weakness or want of power of the digestive juices in the stomach to convert what we eat and drink into healthy matter for the proper nourishment of the whole system. It is caused by everything which weakens the system in general, or the stomach in particular. From it proceed nearly all the diseases to which we are liable; for it is very certain that if we could always keep the stomach right we should only die by old age or accident. Indigestion produces a great variety of unpleasant sensations; amongst the most prominent of its miserable effects are a want of, or an inordinate appetite, sometimes attended with a constant craving for drink, a distension or feeling of enlargement of the stomach, flatulency, heartburn, pain in the stomach, acidity, unpleasant taste in the mouth, perhaps sickness, rumbling noise in the bowels; in some cases of depraved digestion there is nearly a complete disrelish for food, but still the appetite is not greatly impaired, as at the stated period of meals persons so afflicted can eat heartily, although without much gratification; a long train of nervous symptoms are also frequent attendants, general debility, great languidness, and incapacity for exertion. The minds of persons so afflicted frequently become irritable and desponding, and great anxiety is observable in the countenance; they appear thoughtful, melancholy, and dejected, under great apprehension of some imaginary danger, will start at any unexpected noise or occurrence, and become so agitated that they require some time to calm and collect themselves; yet for all this the mind is exhilarated

without much difficulty; pleasing events, society, will for a time dissipate all appearance of disease; but the excitement produced by an agreeable change vanishes soon after the cause has gone by. Other symptoms are, violent palpitations, restlessness, the sleep disturbed by frightful dreams and startings, and affording little or no refreshment; occasionally there is much moaning, with a sense of weight and oppression upon the chest, night-mare, &c.

It is almost impossible to enumerate all the symptoms of this first invader upon the constitution, as in a hundred cases of *Indigestion* there will probably be something peculiar to each; but be they what they may, they are all occasioned by the food becoming a burden rather than a support to the stomach; and in all its stages the medicine most wanted is that which will afford speedy and effectual assistance to the digestive organs, and give energy to the nervous and muscular systems—nothing can more speedily, or with more certainty, effect so desirable an object than *Norton's Extract of Camomile Flowers*. The herb has from time immemorial been highly esteemed in England as a grateful anodyne, imparting an aromatic bitter to the taste and a pleasing degree of warmth and strength to the stomach; and in all cases of indigestion, gout in the stomach, windy colic, and general weakness, it has for ages been strongly recommended by the most eminent practitioners as very useful and beneficial. The great, indeed only, objection to its use has been the large quantity of water which it takes to dissolve a small part of the flowers and

which must be taken with it into the stomach. It requires a quarter of a pint of boiling water to dissolve the soluble portion of one drachm of Camomile Flowers; and when one or even two ounces may be taken with advantage, it must at once be seen how impossible it is to take a proper dose of this wholesome herb in the form of tea; and the only reason why it has not long since been placed the very first in rank of all restorative medicines is, that in taking it the stomach has always been loaded with water, which tends in a great measure to counteract, and very frequently wholly to destroy, the effect. It must be evident that loading a weak stomach with a large quantity of water, merely for the purpose of conveying into it a small quantity of medicine, must be injurious; and that the medicine must possess powerful renovating properties only to counteract the bad effects likely to be produced by the water. Generally speaking, this has been the case with Camomile Flowers, a herb possessing the highest restorative qualities, and when properly taken, decidedly the most speedy restorer, and the most certain preserver of health.

NORTON'S CAMOMILE PILLS are prepared by a peculiar process, accidentally discovered, and known only to the proprietor, and which he firmly believes to be one of the most valuable modern discoveries in medicine, by which all the essential and extractive matter of more than an ounce of the flowers is concentrated in four moderate-sized pills. Experience has afforded the most ample proof that they possess all the fine aromatic and stomachic properties for which the herb has been esteemed; and, as they are taken into the stomach unencumbered by any diluting or indigestible substance, in the same degree has their benefit been more immediate and decided. Mild in their operation and pleasant in their effect, they may be taken at any age, and under any circumstances, without danger or inconvenience. A person exposed to cold and wet a whole day or night could not possibly receive any injury from taking them, but, on the contrary, they would effectually prevent a cold being taken. After a long acquaintance with and strict observance of the medicinal properties of *Norton's Camomile Pills*, it is only doing them justice to say, that they are really the most valuable of all **TONIC MEDICINES**. By the word tonic is meant a medicine

which gives strength to the stomach sufficient to digest in proper quantities all wholesome food, which increases the power of every nerve and muscle of the human body; or, in other words, invigorates the nervous and muscular systems. The solidity or firmness of the whole tissue of the body, which so quickly follows the use of *Norton's Camomile Pills*, their certain and speedy effect in repairing the partial dilapidations from time or intemperance, and their lasting salutary influence on the whole frame, is most convincing, that in the smallest compass is contained the largest quantity of the tonic principle, of so peculiar a nature as to pervade the whole system, through which it diffuses health and strength sufficient to resist the formation of disease, and also to fortify the constitution against contagion; as such their general use is strongly recommended as a preventative during the prevalence of malignant fever or other infectious diseases, and to persons attending sick-rooms they are invaluable, as in no one instance have they ever failed in preventing the taking of illness, even under the most trying circumstances.

As *Norton's Camomile Pills* are particularly recommended for all stomach complaints or indigestion, it will probably be expected that some advice should be given respecting diet, though after all that has been written upon the subject, after the publication of volume upon volume, after the country has, as it were, been inundated with practical essays on diet as a means of prolonging life, it would be unnecessary to say more, did we not feel it our duty to make the humble endeavour of inducing the public to regard them not, but to adopt that course which is dictated by nature, by reason, and by common sense. Those persons who study the wholesomes, and are governed by the opinion of writers on diet, are uniformly both unhealthy in body and weak in mind. There can be no doubt that the palate is designed to inform us what is proper for the stomach, and of course that must best instruct us what food to take and what to avoid; we want no other adviser. Nothing can be more clear than that those articles which are agreeable to the taste were by nature intended for our food and sustenance, whether liquid or solid, foreign or of native production; if they are pure and unadulterated, no harm need be dreaded by

their use; they will only injure by abuse. Consequently, whatever the palate approves, eat and drink always in moderation, but never in excess; keeping in mind that the first process of digestion is performed in the mouth, the second in the stomach; and that, in order that the stomach may be able to do its work properly, it is requisite the first process should be well performed; this consists in masticating or chewing the solid food, so as to break down and separate the fibres and small substances of meat and vegetable, mixing them well, and blending the whole together before they are swallowed; and it is particularly urged upon all to take plenty of time to their meals and never eat in haste. If you conform to this short and simple, but comprehensive advice, and find that there are various things which others eat and drink with pleasure and without inconvenience, and which would be pleasant to yourself only that they disagree, you may at once conclude that the fault is in the stomach, that it does not possess the power which it ought to do, that it wants assistance, and the sooner that assistance is afforded the better. A very short trial of this medicine will best prove how soon it will put the stomach in a condition to perform with ease all the work which nature intended for it. By its use you will soon be able to enjoy, in moderation, whatever is agreeable to the taste, and unable to name one individual article of food which disagrees with or sits unpleasantly on the stomach. Never forget that a small meal well digested affords more nourishment to the system than a large one, even of the same food, when digested imperfectly. Let the dish be ever so delicious, ever so enticing a variety offered, the bottle ever so enchanting, never forget that temperance tends to preserve health, and that health is the soul of enjoyment. But should an impropriety be at any time, or ever so often committed, by which the stomach becomes overloaded or disordered, render it immediate aid by taking a dose of *Norton's Camomile Pills*, which will so promptly assist in carrying off the bur-

den thus imposed upon it, that all will soon be right again.

It is most certainly true that every person in his lifetime consumes a quantity of noxious matter, which if taken at one meal would be fatal: it is these small quantities of noxious matter, which are introduced into our food, either by accident or wilful adulteration, which we find so often upset the stomach, and not unfrequently lay the foundation of illness, and perhaps final ruin to health. To preserve the constitution, it should be our constant care, if possible, to counteract the effect of these small quantities of unwholesome matter; and whenever, in that way, an enemy to the constitution finds its way into the stomach, a friend should immediately be sent after it, which would prevent its mischievous effects, and expel it altogether; no better friend can be found—no, none which will perform the task with greater certainty, than **NORTON'S CAMOMILE PILLS**. And let it be observed, that the longer this medicine is taken the less it will be wanted, and it can in no case become habitual, as its entire action is to give energy and force to the stomach, which is the spring of life, the source from which the whole frame draws its succour and support. After an excess of eating or drinking, and upon every occasion of the general health being at all disturbed, these **PILLS** should be immediately taken, as they will stop and eradicate disease at its commencement. Indeed, it is most confidently asserted that, by the timely use of this medicine only, and a common degree of caution, any person may enjoy all the comforts within his reach, may pass through life without an illness, and with the certainty of attaining a healthy **OLD AGE**.

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Sold by nearly all respectable Medicine Vendors.
Be particular to ask for "**NORTON'S PILLS**," and do not be persuaded to purchase an imitation.

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A CLEAR COMPLEXION!!!

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IS strongly recommended for Softening, Improving, Beautifying, and Preserving the SKIN, and giving it a blooming and charming appearance. It will completely remove Tan, Sunburn, Redness, &c., and by its Balsamic and Healing qualities render the skin soft, pliable, and free from dryness, &c., clear it from every humour, pimple, or eruption; and by continuing its use only a short time, the skin will become and continue soft and smooth, and the complexion perfectly clear and beautiful.

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STEEDMAN'S SOOTHING POWDERS FOR CHILDREN CUTTING TEETH.

THE value of this Medicine has been largely tested in all parts of the world and by all grades of society for upwards of fifty years.

Its extensive sale has induced spurious imitations, in some of which the outside Label and the coloured Paper enclosing the Packet of Powders so closely resemble the Original as to have deceived many Purchasers. The Proprietor therefore feels it due to the Public to give a special caution against such imitations.

All purchasers are therefore requested carefully to observe that the words "JOHN STEEDMAN, Chemist, Walworth, Surrey," are engraved on the Government Stamp affixed to each Packet, in White Letters on a Red Ground, without which none are genuine. The name STEEDMAN is spelt with *two EE's*.

Prepared ONLY at Walworth, Surrey, and
Sold by all Chemists and Medicine Vendors,
in Packets, 1s. 1½d. and 2s. 9d. each.

Life Association of Scotland.

INVESTMENT-ASSURANCE—Actual Results of the BONUS SYSTEM IN CLASS B.

Illustrations of the highly advantageous position of the Policyholder, and the Valuable Benefits in his option.

WHOLE of LIFE POLICY, of £1000, payable at death whenever it happens. The Benefits under larger or smaller Policies are proportionate. BONUSES available only if fixed Age be reached, as explained on First Page.

Age at Entry (next Birthday),	AGE 21	AGE 23	AGE 25	AGE 27	AGE 30	AGE 32	AGE 34	AGE 36	AGE 38	AGE 40	AGE 42	AGE 44	AGE 46	AGE 50
Annual Premium payable for Policy,	£19 16 8	£20 16 8	£22 0 0	£23 6 8	£25 0 0	£26 3 4	£27 13 4	£29 3 4	£30 13 4	£32 13 4	£34 16 8	£37 6 8	£40 3 4	£46 13 4
Sum Assured payable at death in first or any future year,	£1000	£1000	£1000	£1000	£1000	£1000	£1000	£1000	£1000	£1000	£1000	£1000	£1000	£1000
Age when Bonuses are available,	62	62	63	63	64	65	66	66	67	68	68	69	70	71
TOTAL PREMIUMS Paid then amount to,	£833	£833	£858	£863	£875	£889	£913	£904	£920	£947	£940	£970	£1004	£1026
BONUS ADDITIONS to Policy,	1680	1600	1560	1480	1400	1360	1320	1240	1200	1160	1080	1040	1000	880
SUM ASSURED & BONUSES payable, at death,	2680	2600	2560	2480	2400	2360	2320	2240	2200	2160	2080	2040	2000	1880
Policy continued at same premium and Bonuses alone exchangeable for CASH PAYMENT of, .	£993	£945	£938	£890	£856	£845	£834	£783	£770	£756	£704	£688	£672	£600
or, LIFE ANNUITY of, .	101	96	99	94	93	95	98	92	94	96	89	91	93	87
Policy and Bonuses exchangeable for PAID-UP POLICY of, .	£2339	£2242	£2201	£2099	£2012	£1975	£1934	£1833	£1795	£1752	£1645	£1600	£1553	£1391
or, CASH PAYMENT of, .	1383	1325	1324	1262	1231	1228	1222	1159	1153	1143	1073	1060	1045	950
or, LIFE ANNUITY of, .	141	135	139	133	134	139	143	136	140	145	136	140	145	138

THE ABOVE FIGURES are calculated on the basis that the future Bonuses will be at the same rate as those declared at the past Divisions of Profit, and according to the Association's present practice as to surrenders and exchanges. They cannot, therefore, be absolutely guaranteed, and are presented only as what may be reasonably expected by the policyholders; on the other hand they may be even exceeded by the future results. THE ABOVE BONUSES are applicable also to "Whole of Life" Policies payable by ten, fifteen, or any other limited number of premiums.

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LIFE ASSOCIATION OF SCOTLAND

45th YEAR

Claims & Bonuses Paid **4½ MILLIONS STG**

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The Rt. Hon. Sir LYON PLAYFAIR, K.C.B., M.P., Chairman at London.

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SECURING TO POLICYHOLDERS WHO ATTAIN AN AVERAGE AGE THE
FULL BENEFIT OF THEIR PAYMENTS TO AN EXTENT
UNATTAINABLE IN ANY OTHER INSTITUTION.

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The Class was begun in 1860, and at each of the Quinquennial Divisions of profit, the declared Bonuses were three or four times greater than the ordinary Bonuses of other Assurance offices. When the life assured has arrived at the fixed age, the Bonuses are at his disposal. They may remain as an increase to the sum assured; or, at his option, they may be converted into a Cash Payment or a Life Annuity of important amount for himself.

The Result is that Policyholders, on attaining a comparatively moderate age, find their Sums Assured increased to two or three times their original amount, and exchangeable for Cash Payments or Life Annuities far exceeding in amount and value the premiums paid for the policies. (See details on other side.)

THE POLICIES contain no RESTRICTIONS as to place of RESIDENCE; and the rates of Premium are not higher than are usually required for ordinary Policies.

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WITHOUT EXTRA CHARGE.

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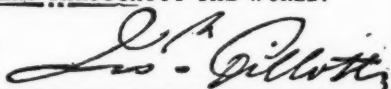
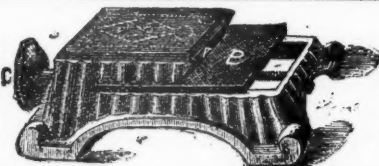
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PARIS, 1875.

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Signature,

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Post Free, ss. 3d.**EDWARD SMITH'S NEW SCISSOR SHARPENER, REG.**

Is the wonder of the age. It will put a better edge on a pair of scissors in ten seconds than any grinder can in ten minutes; anyone can use it, and it will never wear out; the directions are most simple, and not the least particle of skill is required; it does not wear away the scissors in the least; no household should be without one. Nothing can be worse when you have work to do than a blunt pair of scissors, but the trouble of sending them to a grinder, and the doubt if they will come home really sharp, also the certainty that they will be ground away to a considerable extent, and perhaps ruined, makes people put up with them, much to their discomfort. My Scissor Sharpener gets over all this difficulty, and will be found not only useful but a perfect boon.

In neat box, with full directions, Post Free, ss. 3d.



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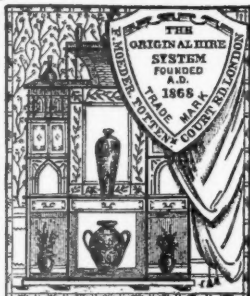
It is the most beautiful and interesting toy I have ever had to offer. Children are transported with delight, and may be amused with it for hours. It is of most simple construction, and cannot get out of order.

PRICE, in box, with full directions, 2s. 3d.,
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OLDRIDGE'S BALM OF COLUMBIA

(ESTABLISHED 60 YEARS)

Is the best and only certain remedy ever discovered for Preserving,
Strengthening, Beautifying, or Restoring the

HAIR, WHISKERS, OR MOUSTACHES,
And Preventing them Turning Grey.

PRICE 3s. 6d., 6s., and 11s. PER BOTTLE.

C. & A. OLDRIDGE,

22, WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND, LONDON,

And all Chemists and Perfumers.

For Children it is invaluable, as it forms the basis of a magnificent
head of hair, prevents baldness in mature age, and obviates the use of
dyes and poisonous restoratives.



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ANNUAL INCOME £485,000.

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CLAIMS PAID IMMEDIATELY ON PROOF OF DEATH AND TITLE.

WORKING EXPENSES UNDER 6 PER CENT. OF THE INCOME.

FOR MUTUAL LIFE ASSURANCE

Offices: 48, Gracechurch Street, London.



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Many years ago **FOWLER & SHEPPARD'S AMERICAN BAY RUM** was introduced into England from America. Since its introduction many worthless imitations have arisen; so many have been the **FRAUDS** that the Importer has found it necessary to issue this **CAUTION**. Purchasers are requested to ask for **FOWLER & SHEPPARD'S BAY RUM**, and to note that this title is impressed on the glass of all bottles. The *Queen* says: "Fowler & Sheppard's Bay Rum has an agreeable fragrance, and is one of the most cleanly and pleasant washes we know of. It improves very materially the appearance and feeling of the hair, cools the head, promotes the growth of hair, and prevents it from turning gray. It is in no sense a dye, and is perfectly free from the mischievous mineral ingredients so often introduced." Of all Chemists, in bottles, 1/6, 2/6, and 4/6 each, and by Parcels Post on receipt of price from J. SELLEY, Chemist, Earl's Court Rd., London.

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LEWIS'S, in Market Street, MANCHESTER, are the Manufacturers of fine, first-class Velveteens, which are now known all over the world. They are fast pile and fast dyed, and every inch is guaranteed. If a dress should wear badly, or be in any respect faulty, LEWIS'S will give a new dress for nothing at all, and pay the full cost for making and trimming.

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LEWIS'S, of Market Street, MANCHESTER, manufacture these Velveteens themselves, and sell them (or it might almost be said give them) to the Public for 2s. a yard.

LEWIS'S ask Ladies to write for Patterns of these extraordinary Velveteens. They will then be able to judge for themselves whether LEWIS'S, of Market Street, MANCHESTER, praise their Velveteens more than they deserve. Write for Patterns on an ordinary post-card.

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**MALT VINEGAR, PURE PICKLES,
SAUCES, POTTED MEATS, AND FISH,
PREPARED SOUPS,
CALVES' FEET JELLY,
JAMS, AND ORANGE MARMALADE,**

Always bear their Names and Address on the Labels, and

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IN LUCK AT LAST.

By WALTER BESANT,

AUTHOR OF

"ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN," "THE REVOLT OF MAN," "LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY;"

AND JOINT AUTHOR OF

"READY-MONEY MORTIBOY," "THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY," "THE CHAPLAIN OF THE FLEET," "OVER THE SEA WITH THE SAILOR," "WHEN THE SHIP COMES HOME," "THE CAPTAINS' ROOM," ETC., ETC.

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CONTENTS.

I. WITHIN THREE WEEKS	1	VIII. THE DISCOVERY	39
II. FOX AND WOLF	9	IX. DR. WASHINGTON	46
III. IRIS THE HERALD	14	X. IT IS MY COUSIN	49
IV. THE WOLF AT HOME	22	XI. MR. JAMES MAKES ATONEMENT	53
V. AS A BROTHER	28	XII. IS THIS HIS PHOTOGRAPH?	59
VI. COUSIN CLARA	34	XIII. HIS LAST CHANCE	63
VII. ON BATTERSEA TERRACE	36	XIV. THE HAND OF FATE	69

IN LUCK AT LAST.

CHAPTER I. WITHIN THREE WEEKS.

IF everyone were allowed beforehand to choose and select for himself the most pleasant method of performing this earthly pilgrimage, there would be, I have always thought, an immediate run upon that way of getting to the Delectable Mountains which is known as the Craft and Mystery of Second-hand Bookselling. If, further, one were allowed to select and arrange the minor details—such, for instance, as the "pitch" and the character of the shop, it would seem desirable that, as regards the latter, the kind of bookselling should be neither too lofty nor too mean—that is to say, that one's ambition would not aspire to a great collector's establishment, such as one or two we might name in Piccadilly, the Haymarket, or New Bond Street: these should be left to those who greatly dare and are prepared to play the games of Speculation and of Patience; nor, on the other hand, would one choose an open cart at the beginning of the Whitechapel Road, or one of the shops in Seven Dials, whose stock-in-trade consists wholly of three or four boxes outside the door filled with odd volumes at twopence apiece. As for "pitch" or situation, one would wish it to be somewhat retired, but not too much; one would not, for instance, willingly be thrown away in Hoxton, nor would one languish in the obscurity of Kentish Town; a second-hand bookseller must not be so far removed

from the haunts of men as to place him practically beyond the reach of the collector; nor, on the other hand, should he be planted in a busy thoroughfare—the noise of many vehicles, the hurry of quick footsteps, the swift current of anxious humanity are out of harmony with the atmosphere of a second-hand bookshop. Some suggestion of external repose is absolutely necessary; there must be some stillness in the air; yet the thing itself belongs essentially to the city—no one can imagine a second-hand bookshop beside green fields—so that there should be some murmur and perceptible hum of mankind always present in the ear. Thus there are half-a-dozen bookshops in King William Street, Strand, which seem to enjoy every possible advantage of position, for they are in the very heart of London, but yet are not exposed to the full noise and tumult of that overflowing tide which surges round Charing Cross. Again, there are streets north of Holborn and Oxford Street most pleasantly situated for the second-hand bookseller, and there are streets where he ought not to be, where he has no business, and where his presence jars. Could we, for instance, endure to see the shop of a second-hand bookseller established in Cheapside?

Perhaps, however, the most delightful spot in all London for a second-hand bookshop is that occupied by Emblem's in the King's Road, Chelsea.

It stands at the lower end of the road,

where one begins to realise and thoroughly feel the influences of that ancient and lordly suburb. At this end of the road there are rows of houses with old-fashioned balconies; right and left of it there are streets which in the summer and early autumn are green, yellow, red, and golden with their masses of creepers; squares which look as if, with the people living in them, they must belong to the year eighteen hundred; neither a day before nor a day after; they lie open to the road, with their gardens full of trees. Cheyne Walk and the old church, with its red-brick tower, and the new Embankment, are all so close that they seem part and parcel of the King's Road. The great Hospital is within five minutes' walk, and sometimes the honest veterans themselves may be seen wandering in the road. The air is heavy with associations and memories. You can actually smell the fragrance of the new-made Chelsea buns, fresh from the oven, just as you would a hundred years ago. You may sit with dainty damsels, all hoops and furbelows, eating custards at the Bun-house; you may wander among the rare plants of the Botanic Gardens. The old great houses rise, shadowy and magnificent, above the modern terraces; Don Saltero's Coffee-House yet opens its hospitable doors; Sir Thomas More meditates again on Cheyne Walk; at dead of night the ghosts of ancient minuet tunes may be heard from the Rotunda of Ranelagh Gardens, though the new barracks stand upon its site; and along the modern streets you may fancy that if you saw the ladies with their hoop petticoats, and the gentlemen with their wigs and their three-cornered hats and swords, you would not be in the least astonished.

Emblem's is one of two or three shops which stand together, but it differs from its neighbours in many important particulars. For it has no plate-glass, as the others have; nor does it stand like them with open doors; nor does it flare away gas at night; nor is it bright with gilding and fresh paint; nor does it seek to attract notice by posters and bills. On the contrary, it retains the old, small, and unpretending panes of glass which it has always had; in the evening it is dimly lighted, and it closes early; its door is always shut, and although the name over the shop is dingy, one feels that a coat of paint, while it would certainly freshen up the place, would take something from its character. For a second-hand bookseller who respects him-

self must present an exterior which has something of faded splendour, of worn paint and shabbiness. Within the shop, books line the walls and cumber the floor. There are an outer and an inner shop; in the former a small table stands among the books, at which Mr. James, the Assistant, is always at work cataloguing, when he is not tying up parcels; sometimes even with gum and paste repairing the slighter ravages of time—foxed bindings and close-cut margins no man can repair. In the latter, which is Mr. Emblem's sanctum, there are chairs and a table, also covered with books, a writing-desk, a small safe, and a glass case, wherein are secured the more costly books in stock. Emblem's, as must be confessed, is no longer quite what it was in former days; twenty, thirty, or forty years ago that glass case was filled with precious treasures. In those days, if a man wanted a book of county history, or of genealogy, or of heraldry, he knew where was his best chance of finding it, for Emblem's, in its prime and heyday, had its speciality. Other books treating on more frivolous subjects, such as science, belles lettres, Art, or politics, he would consider, buy, and sell again; but he took little pride in them. Collectors of county histories, however, and genealogy-hunters and their kind, knew that at Emblem's, where they would be most likely to get what they wanted, they would have to pay the market price for it.

There is no patience like the patience of a book-collector; there is no such industry given to any work comparable with the thoughtful and anxious industry with which he peruses the latest catalogues; there is no care like unto that which rends his mind before the day of auction or while he is still trying to pick up a bargain; there are no eyes so sharp as those which pry into the contents of a box full of old books, tumbled together, at sixpence apiece. The bookseller himself partakes of the noble enthusiasm of the collector; he is himself a collector, though he sells his collection; like the amateur, the professional moves heaven and earth to get a bargain; like him, he rejoices as much over a book which has been picked up below its price, as over a lost sheep which has returned into the fold. But Emblem is now old, and Emblem's shop is no longer what it was to the collector of the last generation.

It was an afternoon in late September, and in this very year of grace, eighteen

hundred and eighty-four. The day was as sunny and warm as any of the days of its predecessor Augustus the Gorgeous, but yet there was an autumnal feeling in the air which made itself felt even in streets where there were no red and yellow Virginia creepers, no square gardens with long trails of mignonette and banks of flowering nasturtiums. In fact, you cannot anywhere escape the autumnal feeling, which begins about the middle of September. It makes old people think with sadness that the grasshopper is a burden in the land, and that the almond-tree is about to flourish; but the young it fills with a vinous and intoxicated rejoicing, as if the time of feasting, fruits, harvests, and young wine, strong and fruity, was upon the world. It made Mr. James—his surname has never been ascertained, but man and boy, Mr. James has been at Emblem's for twenty-five years and more—leave his table where he was preparing the forthcoming catalogue, and go to the open door, where he wasted a good minute and a half in gazing up at the clear sky and down the sunny street. Then he stretched his arms and returned to his work, impelled by the sense of duty rather than by the scourge of necessity, because there was no hurry about the catalogue and most of the books in it were rubbish, and at that season of the year few customers could be expected, and there were no parcels to tie up and send out. He went back to his work, therefore, but he left the door partly open in order to enjoy the sight of the warm sunshine. Now for Emblem's to have its door open, was much as if Mr. Emblem himself should so far forget his self-respect as to sit in his shirt-sleeves. The shop had been rather dark, the window being full of books, but now through the open door there poured a little stream of sunshine, reflected from some far-off window. It fell upon a row of old eighteenth century volumes, bound in dark and rusty leather, and did so light up and glorify the dingy bindings and faded gold, that they seemed fresh from the binder's hands, and just ready for the noble purchaser, long since dead and gone, whose book plate they bore. Some of this golden stream fell also upon the head of the Assistant—it was a red head, with fiery red eyes, red eyebrows, bristly and thick, and sharp thin features to match—and it gave him the look of one who is dragged unwillingly into the sunlight. However, Mr. James took no notice of the sunshine, and went

on with his cataloguing almost as if he liked that kind of work. There are many people who seem to like dull work, and they would not be a bit more unhappy if they were made to take the place of Sisyphus, or transformed into the damsels who are condemned to toil continually at the weary work of pouring water into a sieve. Perhaps Sisyphus does not so much mind the continual going up and down hill. "After all," he might say, "this is better than the lot of poor Ixion. At all events, I have got my limbs free." Ixion, on the other hand, no doubt, is full of pity for his poor friend Sisyphus. "I, at least," he says, "have no work to do. And the rapid motion of the wheel is in sultry weather sometimes pleasant."

Behind the shop, where had been originally the "back parlour," in the days when every genteel house in Chelsea had both its front and back parlour—the latter for sitting and living in, the former for the reception of company—sat this afternoon the proprietor, the man whose name had stood above the shop for fifty years, the original and only Emblem. He was—nay, he is—for you may still find him in his place, and may make his acquaintance over a county history any day in the King's Road—he is an old man now, advanced in the seventies, who was born before the battle of Waterloo was fought, and can remember Chelsea when it was full of veterans wounded in battles fought long before the Corsican Attila was let loose upon the world. His face wears the peaceful and wise expression which belongs peculiarly to his profession. Other callings make a man look peaceful, but not all other callings make him look wise. Mr. Emblem was born by nature of a calm temperament—otherwise he would not have been happy in his business; a smile lies generally upon his lips, and his eyes are soft and benign; his hair is white, and his face, once ruddy, is pale, yet not shrunk and seamed with furrows as happens to so many old men, but round and firm; like his chin and lips it is clean shaven; he wears a black coat extraordinarily shiny in the sleeve, and a black silk stock just as he used to wear in the thirties when he was young, and something of a dandy, and would show himself on a Saturday evening in the pit of Drury Lane; and the stock is fastened behind with a silver buckle. He is, in fact, a delightful old gentleman to look at and pleasant to converse with, and on his brow everyone who

can read may see, visibly stamped, the seal of a harmless and honest life. At the contemplation of such a man, one's opinion of humanity is sensibly raised, and even house-agents, plumbers, and suburban builders, feel that, after all, virtue may bring with it some reward.

The quiet and warmth of the afternoon, unbroken to his accustomed ear, as it would be to a stranger, by the murmurous roll of London, made him sleepy. In his hand he held a letter which he had been reading for the hundredth time and of which he knew by heart every word; and as his eyes closed he went back in imagination to a passage in the past which it recalled.

He stood, in imagination, upon the deck of a sailing-ship—an emigrant ship. The year was eighteen hundred and sixty-four, a year when very few were tempted to try their fortunes in a country torn by civil war. With him were his daughter and his son-in-law, and they were come to bid the latter farewell.

"My dear—my dear," cried the wife, in her husband's arms, "come what may, I will join you in a year."

Her husband shook his head sadly.

"They do not want me here," he said; "the work goes into stronger and rougher hands. Perhaps over there we may get on better, and besides, it seems an opening."

If the kind of work which he wanted was given to stronger and rougher hands than his in England, far more would it be the case in young and rough America. It was journalistic work—writing work—that he wanted; and he was a gentleman, a scholar, and a creature of retired and refined tastes and manners. There are, perhaps, some still living who have survived the tempestuous life of the ordinary Fleet Street "newspaper man" of twenty or thirty years ago; perhaps one or two among these remember Claude Aglen—but he was so short a time with them that it is not likely; those who do remember him will understand that the way to success, rough and thorny for all, for such as Aglen was impossible.

"But you will think every day of little Iris?" said his wife. "Oh, my dear, if I were only going with you! And but for me you would be at home with your father, well and happy."

Then in his dream, which was also a memory, the old man saw how the young husband kissed and comforted his wife.

"My dear," said Claude, "if it were not

for you, what happiness could I have in the world? Courage, my wife, courage and hope. I shall think of you and of Iris all day and all night until we meet again."

And so they parted and the ship sailed away.

The old man opened his eyes and looked about him. It was a dream.

"It was twenty years ago," he said, "and Iris was a baby in arms. Twenty years ago, and he never saw his wife again. Never again! Because she died," he added after a pause; "my Alice died."

He shed no tears, being so old that the time of tears was well-nigh past—at seventy-five the eyes are drier than at forty, and one is no longer surprised or disappointed, and seldom even angry, whatever happens.

But he opened the letter in his hand and read it again mechanically. It was written on thin foreign paper, and the creases of the folds had become gaping rents. It was dated September, 1866, just eighteen years back.

"When you read these lines," the letter said, "I shall be in the silent land, whither Alice, my wife, has gone before me. It would be a strange thing only to think upon this journey which lies before me, and which I must take alone, had I time left for thinking. But I have not. I may last a week, or I may die in a few hours. Therefore, to the point.

"In one small thing we deceived you, Alice and I—my name is not Aglen at all; we took that name for certain reasons. Perhaps we were wrong, but we thought that as we were quite poor, and likely to remain poor, it would be well to keep our secret to ourselves. Forgive us both this suppression of the truth. We were made poor by our own voluntary act and deed, and because I married the only woman I loved.

"I was engaged to a girl whom I did not love. We had been brought up like brother and sister together, but I did not love her, though I was engaged to her. In breaking this engagement I angered my father. In marrying Alice I angered him still more.

"I now know that he has forgiven me; he forgave me on his death-bed; he revoked his former will and made me his sole heir—just as if nothing had happened to destroy his old affection—subject to one condition—viz., that the girl to whom I was first engaged should receive the whole income until I, or my heirs, should return to England in order to claim the inheritance.

"It is strange. I die in a wooden shanty, in a little Western town, the editor of a miserable little country paper. I have not money enough even to bury me, and yet, if I were at home, I might be called a rich man, as men go. My little Iris will be an heiress. At the very moment when I learn that I am my father's heir, I am struck down by fever; and now I know that I shall never get up again.

"It is strange. Yet my father sent me his forgiveness, and my wife is dead, and the wealth that has come is useless to me. Wherefore, nothing now matters much to me, and I know that you will hold my last wishes sacred.

"I desire that Iris shall be educated as well and thoroughly as you can afford; keep her free from rough and rude companions; make her understand that her father was a gentleman of ancient family; this knowledge will, perhaps, help to give her self-respect. If any misfortune should fall upon you, such as the loss of health or wealth, give the papers enclosed to a trustworthy solicitor, and bid him act as is best in the interests of Iris. If, as I hope, all will go well with you, do not open the papers until my child's twenty-first birthday; do not let her know until then that she is going to be rich; on her twenty-first birthday, open the papers and bid her claim her own.

"To the woman I wronged—I know not whether she has married or not—bid Iris carry my last message of sorrow at what has happened. I do not regret, and I have never regretted, that I married Alice. But, I gave her pain, for which I have never ceased to grieve. I have been punished for this breach of faith. You will find among the papers an account of all the circumstances connected with this engagement. There is also in the packet my portrait, taken when I was a lad of sixteen; give her that as well; there is the certificate of my marriage, my register of baptism, that of Iris's baptism, my signet ring—" "His arms"—the old man interrupted his reading—"his arms were: quarterly: first and fourth, two roses and a boar's head, erect; second and third, gules and fesse between—between—but I cannot remember what it was between—" He went on reading: "My father's last letter to me; Alice's letters, and one or two from yourself. If Iris should unhappily die before her twenty-first birthday, open these papers, find out from them the owner's name and address, seek her

out, and tell her that she will never now be disturbed by any claimants to the estate."

The letter ended here abruptly, as if the writer had designed to add more, but was prevented by death.

For there was a postscript, in another hand, which stated: "Mr. Aglen died November 25th, 1866, and is buried in the cemetery of Johnson City, Ill."

The old man folded the letter carefully, and laid it on the table. Then he rose and walked across the room to the safe, which stood with open door in the corner farthest from the fireplace. Among its contents was a packet sealed and tied up in red tape, endorsed: "For Iris. To be given to her on her twenty-first birthday. From her father."

"It will be her twenty-first birthday," he said, "in three weeks. Then I must give her the packet. So—so—with the portrait of her father, and his marriage-certificate." He fell into a fit of musing, with the papers in his hand. "She will be safe, whatever happens to me; and as for me, if I lose her—of course I shall lose her. Why, what will it matter? Have I not lost all, except Iris? One must not be selfish. Oh, Iris, what a surprise—what a surprise I have in store for you!"

He placed the letter he had been reading within the tape which fastened the bundle, so that it should form a part of the communication to be made on Iris's birthday.

"There," he said, "now I shall read this letter no more. I wonder how many times I have read it in the last eighteen years, and how often I have wondered what the child's fortune would be? In three weeks—in three short weeks. Oh, Iris, if you only knew!"

He put back the letters and the packet, locked the safe, and resumed his seat.

The red-eyed Assistant, still gumming and pasting his slips with punctilious regard to duty, had been following his master's movements with curiosity.

"Counting his investments again as usual," Mr. James murmured. "Ah, and adding 'em up! Always at it. Oh, what a trade it must have been once!"

Just then there appeared in the door a gentleman. He was quite shabby, and even ragged in his dress, but he was clearly a gentleman. He was no longer young; his shoulders were bent, and he had the unmistakable stamp and carriage of a student.

"Guv'nor's at home," said the Assistant briefly.

The visitor walked into the sanctum. He had under his arm half-a-dozen volumes, which, without a word, he laid before Mr. Emblem, and untied the string.

"You ought to know this book," he said without further introduction.

Mr. Emblem looked doubtfully at the visitor.

"You sold it to me twenty-five years ago," he went on, "for five pounds."

"I did. And I remember now. You are Mr. Frank Farrar. Why, it is twenty-five years ago!"

"I have bought no more books for twenty years and more," he replied.

"Sad—sad! Dear me—tut, tut!—bought no books? And you, Mr. Farrar, once my best customer. And now—you do not mean to say that you are going to sell—that you actually want to sell—this precious book?"

"I am selling, one by one, all my books," replied the other with a sigh. "I am going downhill, Emblem, fast."

"Oh, dear, dear, dear!" replied the bookseller. "This is very sad. One cannot bear to think of the libraries being dispersed and sold off. And now yours, Mr. Farrar? Really, yours? Must it be?"

"Needs must," Mr. Farrar said with a sickly smile, "needs must when the devil drives. I have parted with half my books already. But I thought you might like to have this set, because they were once your own."

"So I should"—Mr. Emblem laid a loving hand upon the volumes—"so I should, Mr. Farrar, but not from you; not from you, sir. Why, you were almost my best customer—I think almost my very best—thirty years ago, when my trade was better than it is now. Yes, you gave me five pounds—or was it five pounds ten?—for this very work. And it is worth twelve pounds now—I assure you it is worth twelve pounds, if it is worth a penny."

"Will you give me ten pounds for it, then?" cried the other eagerly; "I want the money badly."

"No, I can't; but I will send you to a man who can and will. I do not speculate now; I never go to auctions. I am old, you see. Besides, I am poor. I will not buy your book, but I will send you to a man who will give you ten pounds for it, I am sure, and then he will sell it for fifteen." He wrote the address on a slip

of paper. "Why, Mr. Farrar, if an old friend, so to speak, can put the question, why in the world——"

"The most natural thing," replied Mr. Farrar with a cold laugh; "I am old, as I told you, and the younger men get all the work. That is all. Nobody wants a genealogist and antiquary."

"Dear me, dear me! Why, Mr. Farrar, I remember now; you used to know my poor son-in-law, who is dead eighteen years since. I was just reading the last letter he ever wrote me, just before he died. You used to come here and sit with him in the evening. I remember now. So you did."

"Thank you for your good will," said Mr. Farrar. "Yes, I remember your son-in-law. I knew him before his marriage."

"Did you? Before his marriage? Then——" He was going to add, "Then you can tell me his real name," but he paused, because it is a pity ever to acknowledge ignorance, and especially ignorance in such elementary matters as your son-in-law's name.

So Mr. Emblem checked himself.

"He ought to have been a rich man," Mr. Farrar continued; "but he quarrelled with his father, who cut him off with a shilling, I suppose."

Then the poor scholar, who could find no market for his learned papers, tied up his books again and went away with hanging head.

"Ugh!" Mr. James, who had been listening, groaned as Mr. Farrar passed through the door. "Ugh! Call that a way of doing business? Why, if it had been me, I'd have bought the book off of that old chap for a couple o' pounds, I would. Aye, or a sov, so seedy he is, and wants money so bad. And I know who'd have given twelve pound for it, in the trade too. Call that carrying on business? He may well add up his investments every day, if he can afford to chuck such chances. Ah, but he'll retire soon." His fiery eyes brightened, and his face glowed with the joy of anticipation. "He must retire before long."

There came another visitor. This time it was a lanky boy, with a blue bag over his shoulder and a notebook and pencil-stump in his hand. He nodded to the Assistant as to an old friend with whom one may be at ease, set down his bag, opened his notebook, and nibbled his stump. Then he read aloud, with a comma or semicolon between each, a dozen or twenty titles. They were the names of the books

which his employer wished to pick up. The red-eyed Assistant listened, and shook his head. Then the boy, without another word, shouldered his bag and departed, on his way to the next second-hand book-shop.

He was followed, at a decent interval, by another caller. This time it was an old gentleman who opened the door, put in his head, and looked about him with quick and suspicious glance. At sight of the Assistant he nodded and smiled in the most friendly way possible, and came in.

"Good-morning, Mr. James; good-morning, my friend. Splendid weather. Pray don't disturb yourself. I am just having a look round—only a look round, you know. Don't move, Mr. James."

He addressed Mr. James, but he was looking at the shelves as he spoke, and, with the habit of a book-hunter, taking down the volumes, looking at the title-pages and replacing them; under his arm he carried a single volume in old leather binding.

Mr. James nodded his head, but did disturb himself; in fact, he rose with a scowl upon his face, and followed this polite old gentleman all round the shop, placing himself close to his elbow. One might almost suppose that he suspected him, so close and assiduous was his assistance. But the visitor, accepting these attentions as if they were customary, and the result of high breeding, went slowly round the shelves, taking down book after book, but buying none. Presently he smiled again, and said that he must be moving on, and very politely thanked Mr. James for his kindness.

"Nowhere," he was so good as to say, "does one get so much personal kindness and attention as at Emblem's. Good-morning, Mr. James; good-morning, my friend."

Mr. James grunted; and closed the door after him.

"Ugh!" he said with disgust, "I know you; I know your likes. Want to make your set complete—eh? Want to sneak one of our books to do it with, don't you? Ah!" He looked into the back shop before he returned to his paste and his slips. "That was Mr. Potts, the great Queen Anne collector, sir. Most notorious book-snatcher in all London, and the most barefaced. Wanted our fourth volume of the Athenian Oracle. I saw his eyes reached out this way, and that way, and always resting on that volume. I saw him

edging along to the shelf. Got another odd volume just like it in his wicked old hand, ready to change it when I wasn't looking."

"Ah," said Mr. Emblem, waking up from his dream of Iris and her father's letter; "ah, they will try it on. Keep your eyes open, James."

"No thanks, as usual," grumbled Mr. James as he returned to his gum and his scissors. "Might as well have left him to snatch the book."

Here, however, James was wrong, because it is the first duty of an Assistant to hinder and obstruct the book-snatcher, who carries on his work by methods of crafty and fraudulent exchange rather than by plain theft, which is a mere brutal way. For, first, the book-snatcher marks his prey; he finds the shop which has a set containing the volume which is missing in his own set; next, he arms himself with a volume which closely resembles the one he covets, and then, on pretence of turning over the leaves, he watches his opportunity to effect an exchange, and goes away rejoicing, his set complete. No collector, as is very well known, whether of books, coins, pictures, medals, fans, scarabs, book-plates, autographs, stamps, or anything else, has any conscience at all. Anybody can cut out slips and make a catalogue, but it requires a sharp Assistant, with eyes all over his head like a spider, to be always on guard against this felonious and unscrupulous collector.

Next, there came two schoolboys together, who asked for and bought a crib to Virgil; and then a girl who wanted some cheap French reading-book. Just as the clock began to strike five, Mr. Emblem lifted his head and looked up. The shop-door opened, and there stepped in, rubbing his shoes on the mat as if he belonged to the house, an elderly gentleman of somewhat singular appearance. He wore a Fez cap, but was otherwise dressed as an Englishman—in black frock coat, that is, buttoned up—except that his feet were encased in black cloth shoes, so that he went noiselessly. His hair was short and white, and he wore a small white beard; his skin was a rather dark brown; he was, in fact, a Hindoo, and his name was Lala Roy.

He nodded gravely to Mr. James and walked into the back shop.

"It goes well," he asked, "with the buying and the selling?"

"Surely, Lala, surely."

"A quiet way of buying and selling;

a way fit for one who meditates," said the Hindoo, looking round. "Tell me, my friend, what ails the child? Is she sick?"

"The child is well, Lala."

"Her mind wandered this morning. She failed to perceive a simple method which I tried to teach her. I feared she might be ill."

"She is not ill, my friend, but I think her mind is troubled."

"She is a woman. We are men. There is nothing in the world that is able to trouble the mind of the Philosopher."

"Nothing," said Mr. Emblem manfully, as if he, too, was a Disciple. "Nothing; is there now?"

The stoutness of the assertion was sensibly impaired by the question.

"Not poverty, which is a shadow; nor pain, which passes; nor the loss of woman's love, which is a gain; nor fall from greatness—nothing. Nevertheless," his eyes did look anxious in spite of his philosophy, "this trouble of the child—will it soon be over?"

"I hope this evening," said Mr. Emblem. "Indeed I am sure that it will be finished this evening."

"If the child had a mother, or a brother, or any protectors but ourselves, my friend, we might leave her to them. But she has nobody except you and me. I am glad that she is not ill."

He left Mr. Emblem, and passing through the door of communication between house and shop, went noiselessly up the stairs.

One more visitor—unusual for so many to call on a September afternoon. This time it was a youngish man of thirty or so, who stepped into the shop with an air of business, and, taking no notice at all of the Assistant, walked swiftly into the back shop and shut the door behind him.

"I thought so," murmured Mr. James. "After he's been counting up his investments, his lawyer calls. More investments."

Mr. David Chalker was a solicitor and, according to his friends, who were proud of him, a sharp practitioner. He was, in fact, one of those members of the profession who, starting with no connection, have to make business for themselves. This, in London, they do by encouraging the county court, setting neighbours by the ears, lending money in small sums, fomenting quarrels, charging commissions, and generally making themselves a blessing and a boon to the district where they reside. But chiefly Mr. Chalker occupied himself with lending money.

"Now, Mr. Emblem," he said, not in a menacing tone, but as one who warns; "now, Mr. Emblem."

"Now, Mr. Chalker," the bookseller repeated mildly.

"What are you going to do for me?"

"I got your usual notice," the old bookseller began, hesitating, "six months ago."

"Of course you did. Three fifty is the amount. Three fifty, exactly."

"Just so. But I am afraid I am not prepared to pay off the Bill of Sale. The interest, as usual, will be ready."

"Of course it will. But this time the principal must be ready too."

"Can't you get another client to find the money?"

"No, I can't. Money is tight, and your security, Mr. Emblem, isn't so good as it was."

"The furniture is there, and so is the stock."

"Furniture wears out; as for the stock—who knows what that is worth? All your books together may not be worth fifty pounds, for what I know."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Find the money yourself. Come, Mr. Emblem, everybody knows—your grandson himself told me—all the world knows—you've been for years saving up for your granddaughter. You told Joe only six months ago—you can't deny it—that whatever happened to you she would be well off."

Mr. Emblem did not deny the charge. But he ought not to have told this to his grandson, of all people in the world.

"As for Joe," Mr. Chalker went on, "you are going to do nothing for him. I know that. But is it business-like, Mr. Emblem, to waste good money which you might have invested for your granddaughter?"

"You do not understand, Mr. Chalker. You really do not, and I cannot explain. But about this Bill of Sale—never mind my granddaughter."

"You the aforesaid Richard Emblem"—Mr. Chalker began to recite, without commas—"have assigned to me David Chalker aforesaid his executors administrators and assigns all and singular the several chattels and things specifically described in the schedule hereto annexed by way of security for the payment of the sum of three hundred and fifty pounds and interest thereon at the rate of eight per cent. per annum."

"Thank you, Mr. Chalker. I know all that."

"You can't complain, I'm sure. It is five years since you borrowed the money."

"It was fifty pounds and a box of old law books out of your office, and I signed a bill for a hundred."

"You forget the circumstances."

"No, I do not. My grandson was a rogue. One does not readily forget that circumstance. He was also your friend, I remember."

"And I held my tongue."

"I have had no more money from you, and the sum has become three hundred and fifty."

"Of course you don't understand law, Mr. Emblem. How should you? But we lawyers don't work for nothing. However, it isn't what you got, but what I am to get. Come, my good sir, it's cutting off your nose to spite your face. Settle and have done with it, even if it does take a little slice off your granddaughter's fortune? Now look here"—his voice became persuasive—"why not take me into your confidence? Make a friend of me. You want advice; let me advise you. I can get you good investments—far better than you know anything of—good and safe investments—at six certain, and sometimes seven and even eight per cent. Make me your man of business—come now. As for this trumpery Bill of Sale—this trifle of three fifty, what is it to you? Nothing—nothing. And as for your intention to enrich your granddaughter, and cut off your grandson with a shilling, why I honour you for it—there, though he was my friend. For Joe deserves it thoroughly. I've told him so, mind. You ask him. I've told him so a dozen times. I've said: 'The old man's right, Joe.' Ask him if I haven't."

This was very expansive, but somehow Mr. Emblem did not respond.

Presently, however, he lifted his head.

"I have three weeks still."

"Three weeks still."

"And if I do not find the money within three weeks?"

"Why—but of course you will—but if you do not—I suppose there will be only one thing left to do—realise the security, sell up—sticks and books and all."

"Thank you, Mr. Chalker. I will look round me, and—and—do my best. Good-day, Mr. Chalker."

"The best you can do, Mr. Emblem," returned the solicitor, "is to take me as your adviser. You trust David Chalker."

"Thank you. Good-day, Mr. Chalker."

On his way out, Mr. Chalker stopped for a moment and looked round the shop.

"How's business?" he asked the Assistant.

"Dull, sir," replied Mr. James. "He throws it all away, and neglects his chances. Naturally, being so rich——"

"So rich, indeed," the solicitor echoed.

"It will be bad for his successor," Mr. James went on, thinking how much he should himself like to be that successor. "The goodwill won't be worth half what it ought to be, and the stock is just falling to pieces."

Mr. Chalker looked about him again thoughtfully, and opened his mouth as if about to ask a question, but said nothing. He remembered, in time, that the shopman was not likely to know the amount of his master's capital or investments.

"There isn't a book even in the glass-case that's worth a five-pound note," continued Mr. James, whispering, "and he don't look about for purchases any more. Seems to have lost his pluck."

Mr. Chalker returned to the back-shop.

"Within three weeks, Mr. Emblem," he repeated, and then departed.

Mr. Emblem sat in his chair. He had to find three hundred and fifty pounds in three weeks. No one knew better than himself that this was impossible. Within three weeks! But, in three weeks, he would open the packet of letters, and give Iris her inheritance. At least, she would not suffer. As for himself—He looked round the little back shop, and tried to recall the fifty years he had spent there, the books he had bought and sold, the money which had slipped through his fingers, the friends who had come and gone. Why, as for the books, he seemed to remember them every one—his joy in the purchase, his pride in possession, and his grief at letting them go. All the friends gone before him, his trade sunk to nothing. "Yet," he murmured, "I thought it would last my time."

But the clock struck six. It was his tea-time. He rose mechanically, and went upstairs to Iris.

CHAPTER II. FOX AND WOLF.

MR. JAMES, left to himself, attempted, in accordance with his daily custom, to commit a dishonourable action.

That is to say, he first listened carefully to the retreating footsteps of his master, as he went up the stairs; then he left his table, crept stealthily into the back

shop, and began to pull the drawers, turn the handle of the safe, and try the desk. Everything was carefully locked. Then he turned over all the papers on the table, but found nothing that contained the information he looked for. It was his daily practice thus to try the locks, in hope that some day the safe, or the drawers, or the desk would be left open by accident, when he might be able to solve a certain problem, the doubt and difficulty of which sorely let and hindered him—namely, of what extent, and where placed, were those great treasures, savings, and investments which enabled his master to be careless over his business. It was, further, customary with him to be thus frustrated and disappointed. Having briefly, therefore, also in accordance with his usual custom, expressed his disgust at this want of confidence between master and man, Mr. James returned to his paste and scissors.

About a quarter-past six the shop door was cautiously opened, and a head appeared, which looked round stealthily. Seeing nobody about except Mr. James, the head nodded, and presently, followed by its body, stepped into the shop.

"Where's the Admiral, Foxy?" asked the caller.

"Guv'nor's upstairs, Mr. Joseph, taking of his tea with Miss Iris," replied Mr. James, not at all offended by the allusion to his craftiness. Who should resemble the Fox if not the second-hand bookseller? In no trade, perhaps, can the truly admirable qualities of that animal—his patience, his subtlety and craft, his pertinacity, his sagacity—be illustrated more to advantage. Mr. James felt a glow of virtue—would that he could grow daily and hourly, and more and more towards the Perfect Fox. Then, indeed, and not till then would he be able to live truly up to his second-hand books.

"Having tea with Iris; well——"

The speaker looked as if it required some effort to receive this statement with resignation.

"He always does at six o'clock. Why shouldn't he?" asked Mr. James.

"Because, James, he spends the time in cockering up that gal whom he's ruined and spoiled—him and the old Nigger between them—so that her mind is poisoned against her lawful relations, and nothing will content her but coming into all the old man's money, instead of going share and share alike, as a cousin should, and especially a she cousin, while there's a

biscuit left in the locker and a drop of rum in the cask."

"Ah!" said Mr. James with a touch of sympathy, called forth, perhaps, by mention of the rum, which is a favourite drink with second-hand booksellers' Assistants.

"Nothing too good for her," the other went on; "the best of education, pianos to play upon, and nobody good enough for her to know. Not on visiting terms, if you please, with her neighbours; waiting for Duchesses to call upon her. And what is she, after all? A miserable teacher!"

Mr. Joseph Gallop was a young man somewhere between twenty and thirty, tall, large-limbed, well set-up, and broad-shouldered. A young man who, at first sight, would seem eminently fitted to push his own fortunes. Also, at first sight, a remarkably handsome fellow, with straight, clear-cut features and light, curly hair. When he swung along the street, his round hat carelessly thrown back, and his handsome face lit up by the sun, the old women murmured a blessing upon his comely head—as they used to do, a long time ago, upon the comely and curly head of Absalom—and the young women looked meaningfully at one another—as was also done in the case of Absalom—and the object of their admiration knew that they were saying to each other, in the feminine way, where a look is as good as a whisper, "There goes a handsome fellow." Those who knew him better, and had looked more closely into his face, said that his mouth was bad and his eyes shifty. The same opinion was held by the wiser sort as regards his character. For, on the one hand, some averred that to their certain knowledge Joe Gallop had shown himself a monster of ingratitude towards his grandfather, who had paid his debts and done all kinds of things for him; on the other hand there were some who thought he had been badly treated; and some said that no good would ever come of a young fellow who was never able to remain in the same situation more than a month or so; and others said that he had certainly been unfortunate, but that he was a quick and clever young man, who would some day find the kind of work that suited him, and then he would show everybody of what stuff he was composed. As for us, we have only to judge of him by his actions.

"Perhaps, Mr. Joseph," said Mr. James, "perhaps Miss Iris won't have all bequeathed to her."

"Do you know anything?" Joe asked

quickly. "Has he made a new will lately?"

"Not that I know of. But Mr. Chalker has been here off and on a good bit now."

"Ah! Chalker's a slose one, too. Else he'd tell me, his old friend. Look here, Foxy," he turned a beaming and smiling face upon the Assistant. "If you should see anything or find anything out, tell me, mind. And, remember, I'll make it worth your while."

Mr. James looked as if he was asking himself how Joseph could make it worth his while, seeing that he got nothing more from his grandfather, and by his own showing never would have anything more.

"It's only his will I'm anxious to know about; that, and where he's put away all his money. Think what a dreadful thing it would be for his heirs if he were to go and die suddenly, and none of us to know where his investments are. As for the shop, that is already disposed of, as I dare say you know."

"Disposed of? The shop disposed of! Oh, Lord!" The Assistant turned pale. "Oh, Mr. Joseph," he asked earnestly, "what will become of the shop? And who is to have it?"

"I am to have it," Mr. Joseph replied calmly. This was the Lie Absolute, and he invented it very cleverly and at the right moment—a thing which gives strength and life to a Lie, because he already suspected the truth and guessed the secret hope and ambition which possesses every ambitious Assistant in this trade—namely, to get the succession. Mr. James looked upon himself as the lawful and rightful heir to the business. But sometimes he entertained grievous doubts, and now indeed his heart sank into his boots. "I am to have it," Joe repeated.

"Oh, I didn't know. You are to have it, then? Oh!"

If Mr. James had been ten years younger, I think he would have burst into tears. But at the age of forty weeping no longer presents itself as a form of relief. It is more usual to seek consolation in a swear. He stammered, however, while he turned pale, and then red, and then pale again.

"Yes, quite proper, Mr. Joseph, I'm sure, and a most beautiful business may be made again here by one who understands the way. Oh, you are a lucky man, Mr. Joseph. You are indeed, sir, to get such a noble chance."

"The shop," Joe went on, "was settled

—settled upon me, long ago." The verb "to settle" is capable of conveying large and vague impressions. "But after all, what's the good of this place to a sailor?"

"The good—the good of this place?" Mr. James's cheek flushed. "Why, to make money, to be sure—to coin money in. If I had this place to myself—why—why, in two years I would be making as much as two hundred a year. I would indeed."

"You want to make money. Bah! That's all you fellows think of. To sit in the back shop all day long and to sell mouldy books! We jolly sailor boys know better than that, my lad."

There really was something nautical about the look of the man. He wore a black-silk tie, in a sailor's running knot, the ends loose; his waistcoat was unbuttoned, and his coat was a kind of jacket; not to speak of his swinging walk and careless pose. In fact, he had been a sailor; he had made two voyages to India and back as assistant-purser, or purser's clerk, on board a P. and O. boat, but some disagreement with his commanding officer concerning negligence, or impudence, or drink, or laziness—he had been charged in different situations and at different times with all these vices, either together or separately—caused him to lose his rating on the ship's books. However, he brought away from his short nautical experience, and preserved, a certain nautical swagger, which accorded well with his appearance, and gave him a swashbuckler air, which made those who knew him well lament that he had not graced the Elizabethan era, when he might have become a gallant buccaneer, and so got himself shot through the head, or that he had not flourished under the reign of good Queen Anne, when he would probably have turned pirate and been hanged; or that, being born in the Victorian age, he had not gone to the Far West, where he would, at least, have had the chance of getting shot in a gambling-saloon.

"As for me, when I get the business," he continued, "I shall look about for someone to carry it on until I am able to sell it for what it will fetch. Books at a penny apiece all round, I suppose"—James gasped—"shop furniture thrown in"—James panted—"and the goodwill for a small, lump sum." James wondered how far his own savings, and what he could borrow, might go towards that lump sum, and how much might "remain." "My grandfather, as you know, of course, is soon

going to retire from business altogether." This was another Lie Absolute, as Mr. Emblem had no intention whatever of retiring.

"Soon, Mr. Joseph? He has never said a word to me about it."

"Very soon, now—sooner than you expect. At seventy-five, and with all his money, why should he go on slaving any longer? Very soon, indeed. Any day."

"Mr. Joseph," the assistant positively trembled with eagerness and apprehension.

"What is it, James? Did you really think that a man like me was going to sit in a back shop among these mouldy volumes all day? Come, that's too good. You might have given me credit for being one cut above a counter, too. I am a gentleman, James, if you please; I am an officer and a gentleman."

He then proceeded to explain, in language that smacked something of the sea, that his ideas soared far above trade, which was, at best, a contemptible occupation, and quite unworthy of a gentleman, particularly of an officer and a gentleman; and that his personal friends would never condescend even to formal acquaintance, not to speak of friendship, with trade. This discourse may be omitted. When one reads about such a man as Joe Gallop, when we are told how he looked and what he said and how he said it, with what gestures and in what tone, we feel as if it would be impossible for the simplest person in the world to be mistaken as to his real character. My friends, especially my young friends, so far from the discernment of character being easy, it is, on the contrary, an art most difficult, and very rarely attained. Nature's indications are a kind of handwriting, the characters in which are known to few, so that, for instance, the quick, enquiring glance of an eye, in which one may easily read—who knows the character—treachery, lying, and deception, just as in the letter Beth was originally easily discerned the effigies of a house, may very easily pass unread by the multitude. The language, or rather the alphabet, is much less complicated than the cuneiform of the Medes and Persians, yet no one studies it, except women, most of whom are profoundly skilled in this lore, which makes them so fearfully and wonderfully wise. Thus it is easy for man to deceive his brother man, but not his sister woman. Again, most of us are glad to take everybody on his own statements; there are, or may be, we are all

ready to acknowledge, with sorrow for erring humanity, somewhere else in the world, such things as pretending, swindling, acting a part, and cheating, but they do not and cannot belong to our own world. Mr. James, the Assistant, very well knew that Mr. Emblem's grandson had already, though still young, as bad a record as could be desired by any; that he had been turned out of one situation after another; that his grandfather had long since refused to help him any more; that he was always to be found in the Broad Path which leadeth to destruction. When he had money he ran down that path as fast as his legs could carry him; when he had none, he only walked and wished he could run. But he never left it, and never wished to leave it. Knowing all this, the man accepted and believed every word of Joe's story. James believed it, because he hoped it. He listened respectfully to Joe's declamation on the meanness of trade, and then he rubbed his hands, and said humbly that he ventured to hope, when the sale of the business came on, Mr. Joseph would let him have a chance.

"You?" asked Joe. "I never thought of you. But why not? Why not, I say? Why not you as well as anybody else?"

"Nobody but me, Mr. Joseph, knows what the business is, and how it might be improved; and I could make arrangements for paying by regular instalments."

"Well, we'll talk about it when the time comes. I won't forget. Sailors, you know, can't be expected to understand the value of shops. Say, James, what does the Commodore do all day?"

"Sits in there and adds up his investments."

"Always doing that—eh? Always adding 'em up? Ah! and you've never got a chance of looking over his shoulder, I suppose?"

"Never."

"You may find that chance, one of these days. I should like to know, if only for curiosity, what they are and where they are. He sits in there and adds 'em up. Yes—I've seen him at it. There must be thousands by this time."

"Thousands," said the Assistant, in the belief that the more you add up a sum the larger it grows.

Joe walked into the back shop and tried the safe.

"Where are the keys?" he asked.

"Always in his pocket or on the table before him. He don't leave them about."

"Or you'd ha' known pretty sharp all there is to know—eh, my lad? Well, you're a Foxy one, you are, if ever there was one. Let's be pals, you and me. When the old man goes, you want the shop—well, I don't see why you shouldn't have the shop. Somebody must have the shop; and it will be mine to do what I please with. As for his savings, he says they are all for Iris—well, wills have been set aside before this. Do you think now, seriously, do you think, James, that the old man is quite right—eh? Don't answer in a hurry. Do you think, now, that he is quite right in his chump?"

James laughed.

"He's right enough, though he throws away his chances."

"Throws away his chances. How the deuce can he be all right then? Did you ever hear of a bookseller in his right mind throwing away his chances?"

"Why—no—for that matter——"

"Very well, then; for that matter, don't forget that you've seen him throw away all his chances—all his chances, you said. You are ready to swear to that. Most important evidence, that, James." James had not said "all," but he grunted, and the other man went on: "It may come in useful, this recollection. Keep your eyes wide-open, my red-haired pirate. As for the mouldy old shop, you may consider it as good as your own. Why, I suppose you'll get somebody else to handle the paste-brush and the scissors, and tie up the parcels, and water the shop—eh? You'll be too proud to do that for yourself, you will."

Mr. James grinned and rubbed his hands.

"All your own—eh? Well, you'll wake 'em up a bit, won't you?"

Mr. James grinned again—he continued grinning.

"Go on, Mr. Joseph," he said; "go on—I like it."

"Consider the job as settled, then. As for terms, they shall be easy; I'm not a hard man. And—I say, Foxy, about that safe?"

Mr. James suddenly ceased grinning, because he observed a look in his patron's eyes which alarmed him.

"About that safe. You must find out for me where the old man has put his money, and what it is worth. Do you hear? Or else——"

"How can I find out? He won't tell me any more than you."

"Or else you must put me in the way of finding out." Mr. Joseph lowered his voice to a whisper. "He keeps the keys on the table before him. When a customer takes him out here, he leaves the keys behind him. Do you know the key of the safe?"

"Yes, I know it."

"What is to prevent a clever, quick-eyed fellow like you, mate, stepping in with a bit of wax—eh? While he is talking, you know. You could rush it in a moment."

"It's—it's dangerous, Mr. Joseph."

"So it is—rather dangerous—not much. What of that?"

"I would do anything I could to be of service to you, Mr. Joseph; but that's not honest, and it's dangerous."

"Dangerous! There's danger in the briny deep and shipwreck on the blast, if you come to danger. Do we, therefore, jolly mariners afloat, ever think of that? Never. As to honesty, don't make a man sick."

"Look here, Mr. Joseph. If you'll give me a promise in writing, that I'm to have the shop, as soon as you get it, at a fair valuation and easy terms—say ten per cent. down, and——"

"Stow it, mate; write what you like, and I'll sign it. Now about that key?"

"Supposing you was to get a duplicate key, and supposing you was to get into trouble about it, Mr. Joseph, should you—should you—I only put it to you—should you up and round upon the man as got you that key?"

"Foxy, you are as suspicious as a Chinaman. Well, then, do it this way. Send it me in a letter, and then who is to know where the letter came from?"

The Assistant nodded.

"Then I think I can do the job, though not, perhaps, your way. But I think I can do it. I won't promise for a day or two."

"There you spoke like an honest pal and a friendly shipmate. Dangerous! Of course it is. When the roaring winds do blow—— Hands upon it, brother. Foxy, you've never done a better day's work. You are too crafty for any sailor—you are, indeed. Here, just for a little key——"

"Hush, Mr. Joseph! Oh, pray—pray don't talk so loud! You don't know who may be listening. There's Mr. Lala Roy. You never hear him coming."

"Just for a trifle of a key, you are going to get possession of the best book-shop in all Chelsea. Well, keep your eyes skinned

and the wax ready, will you? And now, James, I'll be off."

"Oh, I say, Mr. Joseph, wait a moment!" James was beginning to realise what he had promised. "If anything dreadful should come of this? I don't know what is in the safe. There may be money as well as papers."

"James, do you think I would steal? Do you mean to insinuate that I am a thief, sir? Do you dare to suspect that I would take money?"

James certainly looked as if he had thought even that possible.

"I shall open the safe, take out the papers, read them, and put them back just as I found them. Will that do for you?"

He shook hands again, and took himself off.

At seven o'clock Mr. Emblem came downstairs again.

"Has anyone been?" he asked as usual.

"Only Mr. Joseph."

"What might Mr. Joseph want?"

"Nothing at all."

"Then," said his grandfather, "Mr. Joseph might just as well have kept away."

Let us anticipate a little. James spent the next day hovering about in the hope that an opportunity would offer of getting the key in his possession for a few moments. There was no opportunity. The bunch of keys lay on the table under the old man's eyes all day, and when he left the table he carried them with him. But the day afterwards he got his chance. One of the old customers called to talk over past bargains and former prizes. Mr. Emblem came out of the back shop with his visitor, and continued talking with him as far as the door. As he passed the table—James's table—he rested the hand which carried the keys on it, and left them there. James pounced upon them and slipped them into his pocket noiselessly. Mr. Emblem returned to his own chair and thought nothing of the keys for an hour and a half by the clock, and during this period James was out on business. When Mr. Emblem remembered his keys, he felt for them in their usual place and missed them, and then began searching about and cried out to James that he had lost his bunch of keys.

"Why, sir," said James, bringing them to him, after a little search, and with a very red face, "here they are; you must have left them on my table."

And in this way the job was done.

CHAPTER III. IRIS THE HERALD.

By a somewhat remarkable coincidence it was on this very evening that Iris first made the acquaintance of her pupil, Mr. Arnold Arbuthnot. These coincidences, I believe, happen oftener in real life than they do even on the stage, where people are always turning up at the very nick of time and the critical moment.

I need little persuasion to make me believe that the first meeting of Arnold Arbuthnot and Iris, on the very evening when her cousin was opening matters with the Foxy one, was nothing short of Providential. You shall see, presently, what things might have happened if they had not met. The meeting was, in fact, the second of the three really important events in the life of a girl. The first, which is seldom remembered with the gratitude which it deserves, is her birth; the second, the first meeting with her future lover; the third, her wedding-day; the other events of a woman's life are interesting, perhaps, but not important.

Certain circumstances, which will be immediately explained, connected with this meeting, made it an event of very considerable interest to Iris, even though she did not suspect its immense importance. So much interest that she thought of nothing else for a week beforehand; that as the appointed hour drew near she trembled and grew pale; that when her grandfather came up for his tea, she, who was usually so quick to discern the least sign of care or anxiety in his face, actually did not observe the trouble, plainly written in his drooping head and anxious eyes, which was due to his interview with Mr. David Chalker.

She poured out the tea, therefore, without one word of sympathy. This would have seemed hard if her grandfather had expected any. He did not, however, because he did not know that the trouble showed in his face, and was trying to look as if nothing had happened. Yet in his brain were ringing and resounding the words, "Within three weeks—within three weeks," with the regularity of a horrid clock at midnight, when one wants to go to sleep.

"Oh," cried Iris, forced, as young people always are, to speak of her own trouble, "oh, grandfather, he is coming to-night."

"Who is coming to-night, my dear?" and then he listened again for the ticking of that clock: "Within three weeks—

within three weeks." "Who is coming to-night, my dear?"

He took the cup of tea from her, and sat down with an old man's deliberation, which springs less from wisdom and the fulness of thought than from respect to rheumatism.

The iteration of that refrain, "Within three weeks," made him forget everything, even the trouble of his granddaughter's mind.

"Oh, grandfather, you cannot have forgotten!"

She spoke with the least possible touch of irritation, because she had been thinking of this thing for a week past, day and night, and it was a thing of such stupendous interest to her, that it seemed impossible that anyone who knew of it could forget what was coming.

"No, no." The old man was stimulated into immediate recollection by the disappointment in her eyes. "No, no, my dear, I have not forgotten. Your pupil is coming. Mr. Arbuthnot is coming. But, Iris, child, don't let that worry you. I will see him for you, if you like."

"No; I must see him myself. You see, dear, there is the awful deception. Oh, how shall I tell him?"

"No deception at all," he said stoutly. "You advertised in your own initials. He never asked if the initials belonged to a man or to a woman. The other pupils do not know. Why should this one? What does it matter to him if you have done the work for which he engaged your services?"

"But, oh, he is so different! And the others, you know, keep to the subject."

"So should he, then. Why didn't he?"

"But he hasn't. And I have been answering him, and he must think that I was drawing him on to tell me more about himself; and now—oh, what will he think? I drew him on and on—yet I didn't mean to—till at last he writes to say that he regards me as the best friend and the wisest adviser he has ever had. What will he think and say? Grandfather, it is dreadful!"

"What did you tell him for, Iris, my dear? Why couldn't you let things go on? And by telling him you will lose your pupil."

"Yes, of course; and, worse still, I shall lose his letters. We live so quietly here that his letters have come to me like news of another world. How many

different worlds are there all round one in London? It has been pleasant to read of that one in which ladies go about beautifully dressed always, and where the people have nothing to do but to amuse themselves. He has told me about this world in which he lives, and about his own life, so that I know everything he does, and where he goes; and"—here she sighed heavily—"of course it could not go on for ever; and I should not mind so much if it had not been carried on under false pretences."

"No false pretences at all, my dear. Don't think it."

"I sent back his last cheque," she said, trying to find a little consolation for herself. "But yet——"

"Well, Iris," said her grandfather, "he wanted to learn heraldry, and you have taught him."

"For the last three months"—the girl blushed as if she was confessing her sins—"for the last three months there has not been a single word in his letters about heraldry. He tells me that he writes because he is idle, or because he wants to talk, or because he is alone in his studio, or because he wants his unknown friend's advice. I am his unknown friend, and I have been giving him advice."

"And very good advice, too," said her grandfather benevolently. "Who is so wise as my Iris?"

"I have answered all his letters, and never once told him that I am only a girl."

"I am glad you did not tell him, Iris," said her grandfather; but he did not say why he was glad. "And why can't he go on writing his letters without making any fuss?"

"Because he says he must make the acquaintance of the man—the man, he says—with whom he has been in correspondence so long. This is what he says."

She opened a letter which lay upon a table covered with papers, but her grandfather stopped her.

"Well, my dear, I do not want to know what he says. He wishes to make your acquaintance. Very good, then. You are going to see him, and to tell him who you are. That is enough. But as for deceiving"—he paused, trying to understand this extreme scrupulosity of conscience—"if you come to deceiving—well, in a kind of a sort of way you did allow him to think his correspondent a man. I admit that. What harm is done to him?"

None. He won't be so mean, I suppose, as to ask for his money back again."

"I think he ought to have it all back," said Iris; "yes, all from the very beginning. I am ashamed that I ever took any money from him. My face burns when I think of it."

To this her grandfather made no reply. The returning of money paid for services rendered was, to his commercial mind, too foolish a thing to be even talked about. At the same time, Iris was quite free to manage her own affairs. And then there was that roll of papers in the safe. Why, what matter if she sent away all her pupils? He changed the subject.

"Iris, my dear," he said, "about this other world, where the people amuse themselves; the world which lives in the squares and in the big houses on the Chelsea Embankment here, you know—how should you like, just for a change, to belong to that world and have no work to do?"

"I don't know," she replied carelessly, because the question did not interest her.

"You would have to leave me, of course. You would sever your connection, as they say, with the shop."

"Please, don't let us talk nonsense, grandfather."

"You would have to be ashamed, perhaps, of ever having taught for your living."

"Now that I never should be—never, not if they made me a duchess."

"You would go dressed in silk and velvet. My dear, I should like to see you dressed up just for once, as we have seen them at the theatre."

"Well, I should like one velvet dress in my life. Only one. And it should be crimson—a beautiful, deep, dark crimson."

"Very good. And you would drive in a carriage instead of an omnibus; you would sit in the stalls instead of the upper circle; you would give quantities of money to poor people; and you would buy as many second-hand books as you pleased. There are rich people, I believe, ostentatious people, who buy new books. But you, my dear, have been better brought up. No books are worth buying till they have stood the criticism of a whole generation at least. Never buy new books, my dear."

"I won't," said Iris. "But, you dear old man, what have you got in your head to-night? Why in the world should we talk about getting rich?"

"I was only thinking," he said, "that,

perhaps, you might be so much happier—"

"Happier? Nonsense! I am as happy as I can be. Six pupils already. To be sure I have lost one," she sighed; "and the best among them all."

When her grandfather left her, Iris placed candles on the writing-table, but did not light them, though it was already pretty dark. She had half an hour to wait; and she wanted to think, and candles are not necessary for meditation. She sat at the open window and suffered her thoughts to ramble where they pleased. This is a restful thing to do, especially if your windows look upon a tolerably busy but not noisy London road. For then, it is almost as good as sitting beside a swiftly-running stream; the movement of the people below is like the unceasing flow of the current; the sound of the footsteps is like the whisper of the water along the bank; the echo of the half heard talk strikes your ear like the mysterious voices wafted to the banks from the boats as they go by; and the lights of the shops and the street presently become spectral and unreal like lights seen upon the river in the evening.

Iris had a good many pupils—six, in fact, as she had boasted; why, then, was she so strangely disturbed on account of one?

An old tutor by correspondence may be, and very likely is, indifferent about his pupils, because he has had so many; but Iris was a young tutor, and had as yet known few. One of her pupils, for instance, was a gentleman in the fruit and potato line, in the Borough. By reason of his early education, which had not been neglected so much as entirely omitted, he was unable to personally conduct his accounts. Now a merchant without his accounts is as helpless as a Tourist without his Cook. So that he desired, in his mature age, to learn book-keeping, compound addition, subtraction, and multiplication. He had no partners, so that he did not want Division. But it is difficult—say, well-nigh impossible—for a middle-aged merchant, not trained in the graces of letter-writing, to inspire a young lady with personal regard, even though she is privileged to follow the current of his thoughts day by day, and to set him his sums.

Next there was a young fellow of nineteen or twenty, who was beginning life as an assistant-teacher in a commercial school

at Lower Clapton. This way is a stony and a thorny path to tread; no one walks upon it willingly; those who are compelled to enter upon it speedily either run away and enlist, or they go and find a secluded spot in which to hang themselves. The smoother ways of the profession are only to be entered by one who is the possessor of a degree, and it was the determination of this young man to pass the London University Examinations, and obtain the degree of Bachelor. In this way his value in the Educational market would be at once doubled, and he could command a better place and lighter work. He showed himself, in his letters, to be an eminently practical, shrewd, selfish, and thick-skinned young man, who would quite certainly get on in the world, and was resolved to lose no opportunities, and, with that view, he took as much work out of his tutor as he could get for the money. Had he known that the "I. A." who took such a wonderful amount of trouble with his papers was only a woman, he would certainly have extorted a great deal more work for his money. All this Iris read in his letters and understood. There is no way in which a man more surely and more naturally reveals his true character than in his correspondence, so that after a while, even though the subject of the letters be nothing more interesting than the studies in hand, those who write the letters may learn to know each other if they have but the mother wit to read between the lines. Certainly this young schoolmaster did not know Iris, nor did he desire to discover what she was like, being wholly occupied with the study of himself. Strange and kindly provision of Nature. The less desirable a man actually appears to others, the more fondly he loves and believes in himself. I have heard it whispered that Narcissus was a hunchback.

Then there was another pupil, a girl who was working her very hardest in order to become, as she hoped, a first-class governess, and who, poor thing! by reason of natural thickness would never reach even the third rank. Iris would have been sorry for her, because she worked so fiercely, and was so stupid, but there was something hard and unsympathetic in her nature which forbade pity. She was miserably poor, too, and had an unsuccessful father, no doubt as stupid as herself, and made pitiful excuses for not forwarding the slender fees with regularity.

Everybody who is poor should be, on that ground alone, worthy of pity and sympathy. But the hardness, and stupidity, and the ill-temper, all combined and clearly shown in her letters, repelled her tutor. Iris, who drew imaginary portraits of her pupils, pictured the girl as plain to look upon, with a dull eye, a leathery, pallid cheek, a forehead without sunshine upon it, and lips which seldom parted with a smile.

Then there was, besides, a Cambridge undergraduate. He was neither clever, nor industrious, nor very ambitious; he thought that a moderate place was quite good enough for him to aim at, and he found that this unknown and obscure tutor by correspondence was cheap and obliging, and willing to take trouble, and quite as efficacious for his purposes as the most expensive Cambridge coach. Iris presently discovered that he was lazy and luxurious, a deceiver of himself, a dweller in Fool's Paradise, and a consistent shirker of work. Therefore, she disliked him. Had she actually known him and talked with him, she might have liked him better in spite of these faults and shortcomings, for he was really a pleasant, easy-going youth, who wallowed in intellectual sloth, but loved physical activity; who will presently drop easily, and comfortably, and without an effort or a doubt, into the bosom of the Church, and will develop later on into an admirable country parson, unless they disestablish the Establishment; in which case, I do not know what he will do.

But this other man, this man who was coming for an explanation, this Mr. Arnold Arbuthnot, was, if you please, a very different kind of pupil. In the first place he was a gentleman, a fact which he displayed, but not ostentatiously, in every line of his letters; next, he had come to her for instruction—the only pupil she had in that science, in heraldry, which she loved. It is far more pleasant to be describing a shield and setting questions in the queer old language of this queer old science, than in solving and proposing problems in trigonometry and conic sections. And then—how if your pupil begins to talk round the subject and to wander into other things? You cannot very well talk round a branch of mathematics, but heraldry is a subject surrounded by fields, meadows, and lawns, so to speak, all covered with beautiful flowers. Into these the pupil wandered, and Iris not unwillingly followed.

Thus the teaching of heraldry by correspondence became the most delightful interchange of letters imaginable, set off and enriched with a curious and strange piquancy, derived from the fact that one of them, supposed to be an elderly man, was a young girl, ignorant of the world except from books, and the advice given her by two old men, who formed all her society. Then, as was natural, what was at first a kind of play, became before long a serious and earnest confidence on the one side, and a hesitating reception on the other.

Latterly he more than once amused himself by drawing an imaginary portrait of her; it was a pleasing portrait, but it made her feel uneasy.

"I know you," he said, "from your letters, but yet I want to know you in person. I think you are a man advanced in years." Poor Iris! and she not yet twenty-one. "You sit in your study and read; you wear glasses, and your hair is grey; you have a kind heart and a cheerful voice; you are not rich—you have never tried to make yourself rich; you are therefore little versed in the ways of mankind; you take your ideas chiefly from books; the few friends you have chosen are true and loyal; you are full of sympathy, and quick to read the thoughts of those in whom you take an interest." A very fine character, but it made Iris's cheek to burn and her eyes to drop. To be sure she was not rich, nor did she know the world; so far her pupil was right, but yet she was not grey nor old. And, again, she was not, as he thought, a man.

Letter-writing is not extinct, as it is a commonplace to affirm, and as people would have us believe. Letters are written still—the most delightful letters—letters as copious, as charming, as any of the last century; but men and women no longer write their letters as carefully as they used to do in the old days, because they were then shown about, and very likely read aloud. Our letters, therefore, though their sentences are not so balanced nor their periods so rounded, are more real, more truthful, more spontaneous, and more delightful than the laborious productions of our ancestors, who had to weigh every phrase, and to think out their bons mots, epigrams, and smart things for weeks beforehand, so that the letter might appear full of impromptu wit. I should like, for instance, just for once, to rob the Outward or the Homeward Mail, in order to read all

the delightful letters which go every week backwards and forwards between the folk in India and the folk at home.

"I shall lose my letters," Iris reflected, and her heart sank. Not only did her correspondent begin to draw these imaginary portraits of her, but he proceeded to urge upon her to come out of her concealment, and to grant him an interview. This she might have refused in her desire to continue a correspondence which brightened her monotonous life. But there came another thing, and this decided her. He began to give, and to ask, opinions concerning love, marriage, and such topics—and then she perceived it could not possibly be discussed with him, even in domino and male disguise. "As for love," her pupil wrote, "I suppose it is a real and not a fancied necessity of life. A man, I mean, may go on a long time without it, but there will come a time—do not you think so?—when he is bound to feel the incompleteness of life without a woman to love. We ought to train our boys and girls from the very beginning to regard love and marriage as the only things really worth having, because without them there is no happiness. Give me your own experience. I am sure you must have been in love at some time or other in your life."

Anybody will understand that Iris could not possibly give her own experience in love-matters, nor could she plunge into speculative philosophy of this kind with her pupil. Obviously the thing must come to an end. Therefore she wrote a letter to him, telling him that "I. A." would meet him, if he pleased, that very evening at the hour of eight.

It is by this time sufficiently understood that Iris Aglen professed to teach—it is an unusual combination—mathematics and heraldry; she might also have taught equally well, had she chosen, sweetness of disposition, goodness of heart, the benefits conferred by pure and lofty thoughts on the expression of a girl's face, and the way to acquire all the other gracious, maidenly virtues; but either there is too limited a market for these branches of culture, or—which is perhaps the truer reason—there are so many English girls, not to speak of Americans, who are ready and competent to teach them, and do teach them to their brothers, and their lovers, and to each other, and to their younger sisters all day long.

As for her heraldry, it was natural that she should acquire that science, because her

grandfather knew as much as any Pursuivant or King-at-Arms, and thought that by teaching the child a science which is nowadays cultivated by so few, he was going to make her fortune. Besides, ever mindful of the secret packet, he thought that an heiress ought to understand heraldry. It was, indeed, as you shall see, in this way that her fortune was made; but yet not quite in the way he proposed to make it. Nobody ever makes a fortune quite in the way at first intended for him.

As for her mathematics, it is no wonder that she was good in this science, because she was a pupil of Lala Roy.

This learned Bengalee condescended to acknowledge the study of mathematics as worthy even of the Indian intellect, and amused himself with them when he was not more usefully engaged in chess. He it was who, being a lodger in the house, taught Iris almost as soon as she could read how letters placed side by side may be made to signify and to accomplish stupendous things, and how they may disguise the most graceful and beautiful curves, and how they may even open a way into boundless space, and there disclose marvels. This wondrous world did the philosopher open to the ready and quick-witted girl; nor did he ever lead her to believe that it was at all an unusual or an extraordinary thing for a girl to be so quick and apt for science as herself, nor did he tell her that if she went to Newnham or to Girton, extraordinary glories would await her, with the acclamations of the multitude in the Senate House and the praise of the Moderators. Iris, therefore, was not proud of her mathematics, which seemed part of her very nature. But of her heraldry she was, I fear, extremely proud—proud even to sinfulness. No doubt this was the reason why, through her heraldry, the humiliation of this evening fell upon her.

"If he is young," she thought, "if he is young—and he is sure to be young—he will be very angry at having opened his mind to a girl"—it will be perceived that, although she knew so much mathematics, she was really very ignorant of the opposite sex, not to know that a young man likes nothing so much as the opening of his mind to a young lady. "If he is old, he will be more humiliated still"—as if any man at any age was ever humiliated by confessing himself to a woman. "If he is a proud man, he will never forgive me. Indeed, I am sure that he can never forgive me, whatever kind of man he is.

But I can do no more than tell him I am sorry. If he will not forgive me then, what more can I say? Oh, if he should be vindictive!"

When the clock began to strike the hour of eight, Iris lighted her candles, and before the pulsation of the last stroke had died away, she heard the ringing of the house-bell.

The door was opened by her grandfather himself, and she heard his voice.

"Yes," he said, "you will find your tutor, in the first floor front, alone. If you are inclined to be vindictive, when you hear all, please ring the bell for me."

The visitor mounted the stairs, and Iris, hearing his step, began to tremble and to shake for fear.

When the door opened she did not at first look up. But she knew that her pupil was there, and that he was looking for his tutor.

"Pardon me"—the voice was not unpleasant—"pardon me. I was directed to this room. I have an appointment with my tutor."

"If," said Iris, rising, for the time for confession had at length arrived, "if you are Mr. Arnold Arbuthnot, your appointment is, I believe, with me."

"It is with my tutor," he said.

"I am your tutor. My initials are I. A."

The room was only lighted by two candles, but they showed him the hanging head and the form of a woman, and he thought she looked young, judging by the outline. Her voice was sweet and clear.

"My tutor? You?"

"If you really are Mr. Arnold Arbuthnot, the gentleman who has corresponded with I. A. for the last two years on heraldry, and—and other things, I am your tutor."

She had made the dreaded confession. The rest would be easy. She even ventured to raise her eyes, and she perceived, with a sinking of the heart, that her estimate of her pupil's age was tolerably correct. He was a young man, apparently not more than five or six and twenty.

It now remained to be seen if he was vindictive.

As for the pupil, when he recovered a little from the blow of this announcement, he saw before him a girl, quite young, dressed in a simple grey or drab coloured stuff, which I have reason to believe is called Carmelite. The dress had a crimson kerchief arranged in folds over the front,

and a lace collar, and at first sight it made the beholder feel that, considered merely as a setting of face and figure, it was remarkably effective. Surely this is the true end and aim of all feminine adornment, apart from the elementary object of keeping one warm.

"I—I did not know," the young man said, after a pause, "I did not know at all that I was corresponding with a lady."

Here she raised her eyes again, and he observed that the eyes were very large and full of light—"eyes like the fishpools of Heshbon"—dove's eyes.

"I am very sorry," she said meekly. "It was my fault."

He observed other things now, having regained the use of his senses. Thus he saw that she wore her hair, which was of a wonderful chestnut brown colour, parted at the side like a boy's, and that she had not committed the horrible enormity of cutting it short. He observed, too, that while her lips were quivering and her cheek was blushing, her look was steadfast. Are dove's eyes, he asked himself, always steadfast?

"I ought to have told you long ago, when you began to write about—about yourself and other things, when I understood that you thought I was a man—oh, long ago I ought to have told you the truth!"

"It is wonderful!" said the young man, "it is truly wonderful!" He was thinking of the letters—long letters, full of sympathy, and a curious unworldly wisdom, which she had sent him in reply to his own, and he was comparing them with her youthful face, as one involuntarily compares a poet's appearance with his poetry—generally a disappointing thing to do, and always a foolish thing.

"I am very sorry," she repeated.

"Have you many pupils, like myself?"

"I have several pupils in mathematics. It does not matter to them whether they are taught by a man or a woman. In heraldry I had only one—you."

He looked round the room. One end was occupied by shelves, filled with books; in one of the windows was a table, covered with papers and adorned with a type-writer, by means of which Iris carried on her correspondence. For a moment the unworthy thought crossed his mind that he had been, perhaps, artfully lured on by a Siren for his destruction. Only for a moment, however, because she raised her face and met his gaze again, with eyes so

frank and innocent, that he could not doubt them. Besides, there was the clear outline of her face, so truthful and so honest. The young man was an artist, and therefore believed in outline. Could any sane and intelligent creature doubt those curves of cheek and chin?

"I have put together," she said, "all your letters for you. Here they are. Will you, please, take them back? I must not keep them any longer." He took them, and bowed. "I made this appointment, as you desired, to tell you the truth, because I have deceived you too long; and to beg you to forgive me; and to say that, of course, there is an end to our correspondence."

"Thank you. It shall be as you desire. Exactly," he repeated, "as you desire."

He ought to have gone at once. There was nothing more to say. Yet he lingered, holding the letters in his hand.

"To write these letters," he said, "has been for a long time one of my greatest pleasures, partly because I felt that I was writing to a friend, and so wrote in full trust and confidence, partly because they procured me a reply—in the shape of your letters. Must I take back these letters of mine?"

She made no answer.

"It is hard, is it not, to lose a friend so slowly acquired, thus suddenly and unexpectedly?"

"Yes," she said, "it is hard. I am very sorry. It was my fault."

"Perhaps I have said something, in my ignorance—something which ought not to have been said or written—something careless—something which has lowered me in your esteem—"

"Oh no—no!" said Iris quickly. "You have never said anything that a gentleman should not have said."

"And if you yourself found any pleasure in answering my letters—"

"Yes," said Iris with frankness, "it gave me great pleasure to read and to answer your letters, as well as I could."

"I have not brought back your letters. I hope you will allow me to keep them. And, if you will, why should we not continue our correspondence as before?"

But he did not ask the question confidently.

"No," said Iris decidedly; "it can never be continued as before. How could it, when once we have met, and you have learned the truth?"

"Then," he continued, "if we cannot write to each other any more, can we not talk?"

She ought to have informed him on the spot that the thing was quite impossible, and not to be thought of for one moment. She should have said, coldly, but firmly—every right-minded and well-behaved girl would have said, "Sir, it is not right that you should come alone to a young lady's study. Such things are not to be permitted. If we meet in society, we may, perhaps, renew our acquaintance."

But girls do go on sometimes as if there was no such thing as propriety at all, and such cases are said to be growing more frequent. Besides, Iris was not a girl who was conversant with social convenances. She looked at her pupil thoughtfully and frankly.

"Can we?" she asked. She who hesitates is lost, a maxim which cannot be too often read, said, and studied. It is one of the very few golden rules omitted from Solomon's Proverbs. "Can we? It would be pleasant."

"If you will permit me," he blushed and stammered, wondering at her ready acquiescence, "if you will permit me to call upon you sometimes—here, if you will allow me, or anywhere else. You know my name. I am by profession an artist, and I have a studio close at hand in Tite Street."

"To call upon me here?" she repeated.

Now, when one is a tutor, and has been reading with a pupil for two years, one regards that pupil with a feeling which may not be exactly parental, but which is unconventional. If Arnold had said, "Behold me! May I, being a young man, call upon you, a young woman?" she would have replied: "No, young man, that can never be." But when he said, "May I, your pupil, call sometimes upon you, my tutor?" a distinction was at once established by which the impossible became possible.

"Yes," she said, "I think you may call. My grandfather has his tea with me every evening at six. You may call then if it will give you any pleasure."

"You really will let me come here?"

The young man looked as if the permission was likely to give him the greatest pleasure.

"Yes; if you wish it."

She spoke just exactly like an Oxford Don giving an undergraduate permission to take an occasional walk with him, or to call for conversation and advice at certain

times in his rooms. Arnold noticed the manner, and smiled.

"Still," he said, "as your pupil?"

He meant to set her at her ease concerning the propriety of these visits. She thought he meant a continuation of a certain little arrangement as to fees, and blushed.

"No," she said; "I must not consider you as a pupil any longer. You have put an end to that yourself."

"I do not mind, if only I continue your friend."

"Oh," she said, "but we must not pledge ourselves rashly to friendship. Perhaps you will not like me when you once come to know me."

"Then I remain your disciple."

"Oh no," she flushed again, "you must already think me presumptuous enough in venturing to give you advice. I have written so many foolish things——"

"Indeed, no," he interrupted; "a thousand times no. Let me tell you once for all, if I may, that you have taught me a great deal—far more than you can ever understand, or than I can explain. Where did you get your wisdom? Not from the Book of Human Life. Of that you cannot know much as yet."

"The wisdom is in your imagination, I think. You shall not be my pupil, nor my disciple, but—well—because you have told me so much, and I seem to have known you so long, and, besides, because you must never feel ashamed of having told me so much, you shall come, if you please, as my brother."

It was not till afterwards that she reflected on the vast responsibilities she incurred in making this proposal, and on the eagerness with which her pupil accepted it.

"As your brother?" he cried, offering her his hand. "Why, it is far—far more than I could have ventured to hope. Yes, I will come as your brother. And now, although you know so much about me, you have told me nothing about yourself—not even your name."

"My name is Iris Aglen."

"Iris! It is a pretty name."

"It was, I believe, my grandmother's. But I never saw her, and I do not know who or what my father's relations are."

"Iris Aglen!" he repeated. "Iris was the Herald of the Gods, and the rainbow was constructed on purpose to serve her for a way from Heaven to the Earth."

"Mathematicians do not allow that," said the girl, smiling.

"I don't know any mathematics. But now I understand in what school you learned your heraldry. You are Queen-at-Arms at least, and Herald to the Gods of Olympus."

He wished to add something about the loveliness of Aphrodite, and the wisdom of Athene, but he refrained, which was in good taste.

"Thank you, Mr. Arbuthnot," Iris replied. "I learned my heraldry of my grandfather, who taught himself from the books he sells. And my mathematics I learned of Lala Roy, who is our lodger, and a learned Hindoo gentleman. My father is dead—and my mother as well—and I have no friends in the world except these two old men, who love me, and have done their best to spoil me."

Her eyes grew humid and her voice trembled.

No other friends in the world! Strange to say, this young man felt a little sense of relief. No other friends. He ought to have sympathised with the girl's loneliness; he might have asked her how she could possibly endure life without companionship, but he did not; he only felt that other friends might have been rough and ill-bred; this girl derived her refinement, not only from nature, but also from separation from the other girls who might in the ordinary course have been her friends and associates. And if no other friends, then no lover. Arnold was only going to visit the young lady as her brother; but lovers do not generally approve the introduction of such novel effects as that caused by the appearance of a brand-new and previously unsuspected brother. He was glad, on the whole, that there was no lover.

Then he left her, and went home to his studio, where he sat till midnight, sketching a thousand heads one after the other with rapid pencil. They were all girls' heads, and they all had hair parted on the left side, with a broad, square forehead, full eyes, and straight, clear-cut features.

"No," he said, "it is no good. I cannot catch the curve of her mouth—nobody could. What a pretty girl! And I am to be her brother! What will Clara say? And how—oh, how in the world can she be, all at the same time, so young, so pretty, so learned, so quick, so sympathetic, and so wise!"

CHAPTER IV. THE WOLF AT HOME.

THERE is a certain music-hall, in a certain street, leading out of a certain road,

and this is quite clear and definite enough. Its distinctive characteristics, above any of its fellows, is a vulgarity so profound, that the connoisseur or student in that branch of mental culture thinks that here at last he has reached the lowest depths. For this reason one shrinks from actually naming it, because it might become fashionable, and then, if it fondly tried to change its character to suit its changed audience, it might entirely lose its present charm, and become simply commonplace.

Joe Gallop stood in the doorway of this hall, a few days after the Tempting of Mr. James. It was about ten o'clock, when the entertainments were in full blast. He had a cigarette between his lips, as becomes a young man of fashion, but it had gone out, and he was thinking of something. To judge from the cunning look in his eyes, it was something not immediately connected with the good of his fellow-creatures. Presently the music of the orchestra ceased, and certain female acrobats, who had been "contorting" themselves fearfully and horribly for a quarter of an hour upon the stage, kissed their hands, which were as hard as ropes, from the nature of their profession, and smiled a fond farewell. There was some applause, but not much, because neither man nor woman cares greatly for female acrobats, and the performers themselves are with difficulty persuaded to learn their art, and generally make haste to "go in" again as soon as they can, and try henceforward to forget that they have ever done things with ropes and bars.

Joe, when they left the stage, ceased his meditations, whatever may have been their subject, lit a fresh cigarette, and assumed an air of great expectation, as if something really worth seeing and hearing were now about to appear. And when the Chairman brought down the hammer with the announcement that Miss Carlotta Claradine, the People's Favourite, would now oblige, it was Joe who loudly led the way for a tumultuous burst of applause. Then the band, which at this establishment, and others like unto it, only plays two tunes, one for acrobats, and one for singers, struck up the second air, and the People's Favourite appeared. She may have had by nature a sweet and tuneful voice; perhaps it was in order to please her friends, the People, that she converted it into a harsh and rasping voice, that she delivered her words with even too much gesture, and that she uttered a kind of

shriek at the beginning of every verse, which was not in the composer's original music, but was thrown in to compel attention. She was dressed with great simplicity, in plain frock, apron, and white cap, to represent a fair young Quakeress, and she sang a song about her lover with much "archness"—a delightful quality in woman.

"Splendid, splendid! Bravo!" shouted Joseph at the end of the first verse. "That fetches 'em, don't it, sir? Positively drags 'em in, sir."

He addressed his words, without turning his head, to a man who had just come in, and was gazing at him with unbounded astonishment.

"You here, Joe?" he said.

Joe started.

"Why, Chalker, who'd have thought to meet you in this music-hall?"

"It's a good step, isn't it? And what are you doing, Joe? I heard you'd left the P. and O. Company."

"Had to," said Joe. "A gentleman has no choice but to resign. Ought never to have gone there. There's no position, Chalker—no position at all in the service. That is what I felt. Besides, the uniform, for a man of my style, is unbecoming. And the Captain was a Cad."

"Humph! and what are you doing then? Living on the old man again?"

"Never you mind, David Chalker," replied Joe with dignity; "I am not likely to trouble you any more after the last time I called upon you."

"Well, Joe," said the other, without taking offence, "it is not my business to lend money without security, and all you had to offer was your chance of what your grandfather might leave you—or might not."

"And a very good security too, if he does justice to his relations."

"Yes; but how did I know whether he was going to do justice? Come, Joe, don't be shirty with an old friend."

There was a cordiality in the solicitor's manner which boded well. Joe was pretty certain that Mr. Chalker was not a man to cultivate friendship unless something was to be got out of it. It is only the idle and careless who can waste time over unprofitable friendships. With most men friendship means assisting in each other's little games, so that every man must become, on occasion, bonnet, confederate, and pal, for his friend, and may expect the same kindly office for himself.

If Chalker wished to keep up his old

acquaintance with Joe Gallop, there must be some good reason. Now the only reason which suggested itself to Joe at that moment was that Chalker had lately drawn a new will for the old man, and that he himself might be in it. Here he was wrong. The only reason of Mr. Chalker's friendly attitude was curiosity to know what Joe was doing, and how he was living.

"Look here, Chalker," Joe whispered, "you used to pretend to be a pal. What's the good of being a pal if you won't help a fellow? You see my grandfather once a week or so; you shut the door and have long talks with him. If you know what he's going to do with his money, why not tell a fellow? Let's make a business matter of it."

"How much do you know, Joe, and what is your business proposal worth?"

"Nothing at all; that's the honest truth—I know nothing. The old man's as tight as wax. But there's other business in the world besides his. Suppose I know of something a precious sight better than his investments, and suppose—just suppose—that I wanted a lawyer to manage it for me."

"Well, Joe?"

"Encore! Bravo! Encore! Bravo!"

Joe banged his stick on the floor and shouted because the singer ended her first song. He looked so fierce and big, that all the bystanders made haste to follow his example.

"Splendid, isn't she?" he said.

"Hang the singer! What do you mean by other business?"

"Perhaps it's nothing. Perhaps there will be thousands in it. And perhaps I can get on without you, after all."

"Very well, Joe. Get on without me if you like."

"Look here, Chalker," Joe laid a persuasive hand on the other's arm, "can't we two be friendly? Why don't you give a fellow a lift? All I want to know is where the old man's put his money, and how he's left it."

"Suppose I do know," Mr. Chalker replied, wishing ardently that he did, "do you think I am going to betray trust—a solicitor betray trust—and for nothing? But if you want to talk real business, Joe, come to my office. You know where that is."

Joe knew very well; in fact, there had been more than one difficulty which had been adjusted through Mr. Chalker's not wholly disinterested aid.

Then the singer appeared again attired in a new and startling dress, and Joe began once more to applaud again with voice and stick. Mr. Chalker, surprised at this newly-developed enthusiasm for art, left him and walked up the hall, and sat down beside the Chairman, whom he seemed to know. In fact, the Chairman was also the Proprietor of the show, and Mr. Chalker was acting for him in his professional capacity, much as he had acted for Mr. Emblem.

"Who is your new singer?" he asked.

"She calls herself Miss Carlotta Claradine. She's a woman, let me tell you, Mr. Chalker, who will get along. Fine figure, plenty of cheek, loud voice, flings herself about, and don't mind a bit when the words are a leetle strong. That's the kind of singer the people like. That's her husband, at the far end of the room—the big, good-looking chap with the light moustache and the cigarette in his mouth."

"Whew!" Mr. Chalker whistled the low note which indicates surprise. "That's her husband, is it? The husband of Miss Carlotta Claradine, is it? Oho! oho! Her husband! Are you sure he is her husband?"

"Do you know him, then?"

"Yes, I know him. What was the real name of the girl?"

"Charlotte Smithers. This is her first appearance on any stage—and we made up the name for her when we first put her on the posters. I made it myself—out of Chlorodyne, you know, which is in the advertisements. Sounds well, don't it?—Carlotta Claradine."

"Very well, indeed. By Jove! Her husband, is he?"

"And, I suppose," said the Chairman, "lives on his wife's salary. Bless you, Mr. Chalker, there's a whole gang about every theatre and music-hall trying to get hold of the promising girls. It's a regular profession. Them as have nothing but their good looks may do for the mashers, but these chaps look out for the girls who'll bring in the money. What's a pretty face to them compared with the handling of a big salary every week? That's the sort Carlotta's husband belongs to."

"Well, the life will suit him down to the ground."

"And jealous with it, if you please. He comes here every night to applaud and takes her home himself. Keeps himself sober on purpose."

And then the lady appeared again in a

wonderful costume of blue silk and tights, personating the Lion Masher. It was her third and last song.

In the applause which followed, Mr. Chalker could discern plainly the stick as well as the voice of his old friend. And he thought how beautiful is the love of husband unto wife, and he smiled, thinking that when Joe came next to see him, he might perhaps hear truths which he had thought unknown, and, for certain reasons, wished to remain unknown.

Presently he saw the singer pass down the hall, and join her husband, who now, his labours ended, was seeking refreshment at the bar. She was a good-looking girl—still only a girl, and apparently under twenty—quietly dressed, yet looking anything but quiet. But that might have been due to her fringe, which was, so to speak, a prominent feature in her face. She was tall and well-made, with large features, an ample cheek, a full eye, and a wide mouth. A good-natured looking girl, and though her mouth was wide, it suggested smiles. The husband was exchanging a little graceful badinage with the barmaid when she joined him, and perhaps this made her look a little cross. "She's jealous, too," said Mr. Chalker, observant; "all the better." Yet a face which, on the whole, was prepossessing and good-natured, and betokened a disposition to make the best of the world.

"How long has she been married?"

Mr. Chalker asked the Proprietor.

"Only about a month or so."

"Ah!"

Mr. Chalker proceeded to talk business, and gave no further hint of any interest in the newly-married pair.

"Now, Joe," said the singer, with a freezing glance at the barmaid, "are you going to stand here all night?"

Joe drank off his glass and followed his wife into the street. They walked side by side in silence, until they reached their lodgings. Then she threw off her hat and jacket, and sat down on the horsehair sofa and said abruptly:

"I can't do it, Joe; and I won't. So don't ask me."

"Wait a bit—wait a bit, Lotty, my love. Don't be in a hurry, now. Don't say rash things, there's a good girl." Joe spoke quite softly, as if he were not the least angry, but, perhaps, a little hurt. "There's not a bit of a hurry. You needn't decide to-day, nor yet to-morrow."

"I couldn't do it," she said. "Oh, it's a dreadful, wicked thing even to ask me. And only five weeks to-morrow since we married!"

"Lotty, my dear, let us be reasonable." He still spoke quite softly. "If we are not to go on like other people; if we are to be continually bothering our heads about honesty, and that rubbish, we shall be always down in the world. How do other people make money and get on? By humbug, my dear. By humbug. As for you, a little play-acting is nothing."

"But I am not the man's daughter, and my own father's alive and well."

"Look here, Lotty. You are always grumbling about the music-halls."

"Well, and good reason to grumble. If you heard those ballet-girls talk, and see how they go on at the back, you'd grumble. As for the music——" She laughed, as if against her will. "If anybody had told me six months ago—me, that used to go to the Cathedral Service every afternoon—that I should be a Lion Masher at a music-hall, and go on dressed in tights, I should have boxed his ears for impudence."

"Why, you don't mean to tell me, Lotty, that you wish you had stuck to the mouldy old place, and gone on selling music over the counter?"

"Well, then, perhaps I do."

"No, no, Lotty; your husband cannot let you say that."

"My husband can laugh and talk with barmaids. That makes him happy."

"Lotty," he said, "you are a little fool. And think of the Glory. Posters with your name in letters a foot and a half long—'The People's Favourite.' Why, don't they applaud you till their hands drop off?"

She melted a little.

"Applaud! As if that did any good! And me in tights!"

"As for the tights," Joe replied with dignity, "the only person whom you need consult on that subject is your husband; and since I do not object, I should like to see the man who does. Show me that man, Lotty, and I'll straighten him out for you. You have my perfect approval, my dear. I honour you for the tights."

"My husband's approval!"

She repeated his words again in a manner which had been on other occasions most irritating to him. But to-night he refused to be offended.

"Of course," he went on, "as soon as I

get a berth on another ship I shall take you off the boards. It is the husband's greatest delight, especially if he is a jolly sailor, to brave all dangers for his wife. Think, Lotty, how pleasant it would be not to do any more work."

"I should like to sing sometimes, to sing good music, at the great concerts. That's what I thought I was going to do."

"You shall; you shall sing as little or as often as you like. 'A sailor's wife a sailor's star should be.' You shall be a great lady, Lotty, and you shall just command your own line. Wait a bit, and you shall have your own carriage, and your own beautiful house, and go to as many balls as you like among the countesses and the swells."

"Oh, Joe!" she laughed. "Why, if we were as rich as anything, I should never get ladies to call upon me. And as for you, no one would ever take you to be a gentleman, you know."

"Why, what do you call me, now?"

He laughed, but without much enjoyment. No one likes to be told that he is not a gentleman, whatever his own suspicions on the subject may be.

"Never mind. I know a gentleman when I see one. Go on with your nonsense about being rich."

"I shall make you rich, Lotty, whether you like it or not," he said, still with unwonted sweetness.

She shook her head.

"Not by wickedness," she said stoutly.

"I've got here," he pulled a bundle of papers out of his pocket, "all the documents wanted to complete the case. All I want now is for the rightful heiress to step forward."

"I'm not the rightful heiress, and I'm not the woman to step forward, Joe; so don't you think it."

"I've been to-day," Joe continued, "to Doctors' Commons, and I've seen the will. There's no manner of doubt about it; and the money—oh, Lord, Lotty, if you only knew how much it is!"

"What does it matter, Joe, how much it is, if it is neither yours nor mine?"

"It matters this: that it ought all to be mine."

"How can that be, if it was not left to you?"

Joe was nothing, if not a man of resource. He therefore replied without hesitation or confusion:

"The money was left to a certain man and to his heirs. That man is dead. His

heirress should have succeeded, but she was kept out of her rights. She is dead, and I am her cousin, and entitled to all her property, because she made no will."

"Is that gospel truth, Joe? Is she dead? Are you sure?"

"Quite sure," he replied. "Dead as a door-nail."

"Is that the way you got the papers?"

"That's the way, Lotty."

"Then why not go to a lawyer and make him take up the case for you, and honestly get your own?"

"You don't know law, my dear, or you wouldn't talk nonsense about lawyers. There are two ways. One is to go myself to the present unlawful possessor and claim the whole. It's a woman; she would be certain to refuse, and then we should go to law, and very likely lose it all, although the right is on our side. The other way is for some one—say you—to go to her and say: 'I am that man's daughter. Here are my proofs. Here are all his papers. Give me back my own.' That you could do in the interests of justice, though I own it is not the exact truth."

"And if she refuses then?"

"She can't refuse, with the man's daughter actually standing before her. She might make a fuss for a bit. But she would have to give in at last."

"Joe, consider. You have got some papers, whatever they may contain. Suppose that it is all true that you have told me—"

"Lotty, my dear, when did I ever tell you an untruth?"

"When did you ever tell me the truth, my dear? Don't talk wild. Suppose it is all true, how are you going to make out where your heirress has been all this time, and what she has been doing?"

"Trust me for that."

"I trust you for making up something or other, but—oh, Joe, you little think, you clever people, how seldom you succeed in deceiving any one."

"I've got such a story for you, Lotty, as would deceive anybody. Listen now. It's part truth, and part—the other thing. Your father—"

"My father, poor dear man," Lotty interrupted, "is minding his music-shop in Gloucester, and little thinking what wickedness his daughter is being asked to do."

"Hang it! the girl's father, then. He died in America, where he went under another name, and you were picked up by

strangers and reared under that name, in complete ignorance of your own family. All which is true and can be proved."

"Who brought her up?"

"People in America. I'm one of 'em."

"Who is to prove that?"

"I am. I am come to England on purpose. I am her guardian."

"Who is to prove that you are the girl's guardian?"

"I shall find somebody to prove that."

His thoughts turned to Mr. Chalker, a gentleman whom he judged capable of proving anything he was paid for.

"And suppose they ask me questions?"

"Don't answer 'em. You know very little. The papers were only found the other day. You are not expected to know anything."

"Where was the real girl?"

"With her grandfather."

"Where was the grandfather?"

"What does that matter?" he replied; "I will tell you afterwards."

"When did the real girl die?"

"That, too, I will tell you afterwards."

Lotty leaned her cheek upon her hand, and looked at her husband thoughtfully.

"Let us be plain, Joe."

"You can never be plain, my dear," he replied with the smile of a lover, not a husband; "never in your husband's eyes; not even in tights."

But she was not to be won by flattery.

"Fine words," she said, "fine words. What do they amount to? Oh, Joe, little I thought when you came along with your beautiful promises, what sort of a man I was going to marry."

"A very good sort of a man," he said.

"You've got a jolly sailor—an officer and a gentleman. Come now, what have you got to say to this? Can't you be satisfied with an officer and a gentleman?"

He drew himself up to his full height. Well, he was a handsome fellow; there was no denying it.

"Good looks and fine words," his wife went on. "Well, and now I've got to keep you, and if you could make me sing in a dozen halls every night, you would, and spend the money on yourself—joyfully you would."

"We would spend it together, my dear. Don't turn rusty, Lotty."

He was not a bad-tempered man, and this kind of talk did not anger him at all. So long as his wife worked hard and brought in the coin for him to spend, what mattered for a few words now and then? Besides, he wanted her assistance.

"What are you driving at?" he went on. "I show you a bit of my hand, and you begin talking round and round. Look here, Lotty. Here's a splendid chance for us. I must have a woman's help. I would rather have your help than any other woman's—yes, than any other woman's in the world. I would indeed. If you won't help me, why, then, of course, I must go to some other woman."

His wife gasped and choked. She knew already, after only five weeks' experience, how bad a man he was—how unscrupulous, false, and treacherous, how lazy and selfish. But, after a fashion, she loved him; after a woman's fashion, she was madly jealous of him. Another woman! And only the other night she had seen him giving brandy-and-soda to one of the music-hall ballet-girls. Another woman!

"If you do, Joe," she said; "oh, if you do—I will kill her and you too!"

He laughed.

"If I do, my dear, you don't think I shall be such a fool as to tell you who she is. Do you suppose that no woman has ever fallen in love with me before you? But then, my pretty, you see I don't talk about them; and do you suppose—oh, Lotty, are you such a fool as to suppose that you are the first girl I ever fell in love with?"

"What do you want me to do? Tell me again."

"I have told you already. I want you to become, for the time, the daughter of the man who died in America; you will claim your inheritance; I will provide you with all the papers; I will stand by you; I will back you up with such a story as will disarm all suspicion. That is all."

"Yes. I understand. Haven't people been sent to prison for less, Joe?"

"Foolish people have. Not people who are well advised and under good management. Mind you, this business is under my direction. I am boss."

She made no reply, but took her candle and went off to bed.

In the dead of night she awakened her husband.

"Joe," she said, "is it true that you know another girl who would do this for you?"

"More than one, Lotty," he replied, this man of resource, although he was only half awake. "More than one. A great many more. Half-a-dozen, I know, at least."

She was silent. Half an hour afterwards she woke him up again.

"Joe," she said, "I've made up my mind. You sha'n't say that I refused to do for you what any other girl in the world would have done."

As a tempter, it will be seen that Joe was unsurpassed.

It was now a week since he had received, carefully wrapped in wool, and deposited in a wooden-box dispatched by Post, a key, newly made. It was, also, very nearly a week since he had used that key. It was used during Mr. Emblem's hour for tea, while James waited and watched outside in an agony of terror. But Joe did not find what he wanted. There were in the safe one or two ledgers, a banker's book, a cheque-book, and a small quantity of money. But there were not any records at all of monies invested. There were no railway certificates, waterwork shares, transfers, or notes of stocks, mortgages, loans, or anything at all. The only thing that he saw was a roll of papers tied up with red tape. On the roll was written: "For Iris. To be given to her on her twenty-first birthday."

"What the deuce is this, I wonder?" Joe took this out and looked at it suspiciously. "Can he be going to give her all his money before he dies? Is he going to make her inherit at once?" The thought was so exasperating that he slipped the roll into his pocket. "At all events," he said, "she sha'n't have them until I have read them first. I dare say they won't be missed for a day or two."

He calculated that he could read and master the contents that night, and put back the papers in the safe in the morning while James was opening the shop.

"There's nothing, James," he whispered as he went out, the safe being locked again. "There is nothing at all. Look here, my lad, you must try another way of finding out where the money is."

"I wish I was sure that he hasn't carried off something in his pocket," James murmured.

Joe spent the whole evening alone, contrary to his usual practice, which was, as we have seen, to spend it at a certain music-hall. He read the papers over and over again.

"I wish," he said at length, "I wish I had known this only two months ago. I wish I had paid more attention to Iris. What a dreadful thing it is to have a grandfather who keeps secrets from his grandson! What a game we might have had over this job! What a game we might have still if——"

And here he stopped, for the first germ or conception of a magnificent coup dawned upon him, and fairly dazzled him so that his eyes saw a bright light and nothing else.

"If Lotty would," he said. "But I am afraid she won't hear of it." He sprang to his feet and caught sight of his own face in the looking-glass over the fireplace. He smiled. "I will try," he said, "I think I know, by this time, how to get round most of 'em. Once they get to feel there are other women in the world, beside themselves, they're pretty easy worked. I will try."

One has only to add to the revelations already made that Joe paid a second visit to the shop, this time early in the morning. The shutters were only just taken down. James was going about with that remarkable watering-pot only used in shops, which has a little stream running out of it, and Mr. Emblem was upstairs slowly shaving and dressing in his bedroom. He walked in, nodded to his friend the Assistant, opened the safe, and put back the roll.

"Now," he murmured, "if the old man has really been such a dunder-headed pump as not to open the packet all these years, what the devil can he know? The name is different; he hasn't got any clue to the will; he hasn't got the certificate of his daughter's marriage, or of the child's baptism—both in the real name. He hasn't got anything. As for the girl here, Iris, having the same christian-name, that's nothing. I suppose there is more than one woman with such a fool of a name as that about in the world."

"Foxy," he said cheerfully, "have you found anything yet about the investments? Odd, isn't it? Nothing in the safe at all. You can have your key back."

He tossed him the key carelessly and went away.

The question of his grandfather's savings was grown insignificant beside this great and splendid prize which lay waiting for him. What could the savings be? At best a few thousands; the slowly saved thrift of fifty years; nobody knew better than Joe himself how much his own profligacies had cost his grandfather; a few thousands, and those settled on his cousin Iris, so that, to get his share, he would have to try every kind of persuasion unless he could get up a case for law. But the other thing—why, it was nearly all personal estate, so far as he could learn by the will, and he had read it over and

over again in the room at Somerset House, with the long table in it, and the watchful man who won't let anybody copy anything. What a shame, he thought, not to let wills be copied! Personalty sworn under a hundred and twenty thousand, all in Three Per Cents., and devised to a certain young lady, the testator's ward, in trust, for the testator's son, or his heirs, when he or they should present themselves. Meantime, the ward was to receive for her own use and benefit, year by year, the whole income.

"It is unfortunate," said Joe, "that we can't come down upon her for arrears. Still, there's an income, a steady income, of three thousand six hundred a year when the son's heirs present themselves. I should like to call myself a solicitor, but that kite won't fly, I'm afraid. Lotty must be the sole heiress. Dressed quiet, without any powder, and her fringe brushed flat, she'd pass for a lady anywhere. Perhaps it's lucky, after all, that I married her, though if I had had the good sense to make up to Iris, who's a deuced sight prettier, she'd have kept me going almost as well with her pupils, and set me right with the old man, and handed me over this magnificent haul for a finish. If only the old man hasn't broken the seals and read the papers!"

The old man had not, and Joe's fears were, therefore, groundless.

CHAPTER V. AS A BROTHER.

ARNOLD immediately began to use the privilege accorded to him with a large and liberal interpretation. If, he argued, a man is to be treated as a brother, there should be the immediate concession of the exchange of christian-names, and he should be allowed to call as often as he pleases. Naturally he began by trying to read the secret of a life self-contained, so dull, and yet so happy, so strange to his experience.

"Is this, Iris," he asked, "all your life? Is there nothing more?"

"No," she said; "I think you have seen all. In the morning I have my correspondence; in the afternoon I do my sewing, I play a little, I read, or I walk, sometimes by myself, and sometimes with Lala Roy; in the evening I play again, or I read again, or I work at the mathematics, while my grandfather and Lala Roy have their chess. We used to go to the theatre sometimes, but of late my grandfather has not gone. At ten we go to bed. That is all my life."

"But, Iris, have you no friends at all,

and no relations? Are there no girls of your own age who come to see you?"

"No, not one; I have a cousin, but he is not a good man at all. His father and mother are in Australia. When he comes here, which is very seldom, my grandfather falls ill only with thinking about him and looking at him. But I have no other relations, because, you see, I do not know who my father's people were."

"Then," said Arnold, "you may be countess in your own right; you may have any number of rich people and nice people for your cousins. Do you not sometimes think of that?"

"No," said Iris; "I never think about things impossible."

"If I were you, I should go about the streets, and walk round the picture-galleries looking for a face like your own. There cannot be many. Let me draw your face, Iris, and then we will send it to the Grosvenor, and label it, 'Wanted, this young lady's cousins.' You must have cousins, if you could only find them out."

"I suppose I must. But what if they should turn out to be rough and disagreeable people?"

"Your cousins could not be disagreeable, Iris," said Arnold.

She shook her head.

"One thing I should like," she replied. "It would be to find that my cousins, if I have any, are clever people—astronomers, mathematicians, great philosophers, and writers. But what nonsense it is even to talk of such things; I am quite alone, except for my grandfather and Lala Roy."

"And they are old," murmured Arnold.

"Do not look at me with such pity," said the girl. "I am very happy. I have my own occupation; I am independent; I have my work to fill my mind; and I have these two old gentlemen to care for and think of. They have taken so much care of me that I ought to think of nothing else but their comfort; and then there are the books downstairs—thousands of beautiful old books always within my reach."

"But you must have some companions, if only to talk and walk with."

"Why, the books are my companions; and then Lala Roy goes for walks with me; and as for talking, I think it is much more pleasant to think."

"Where do you walk?"

"There is Battersea Park; there are the squares; and if you take an omnibus, there are the Gardens and Hyde Park."

"But never alone, Iris?"

"Oh yes, I am often alone. Why not?"

"I suppose," said Arnold, shirking the question, because this is a civilised country, and, in fact, why not? "I suppose that it is your work which keeps you from feeling life dull and monotonous."

"No life," she said, looking as wise as Newton, if Newton was ever young and handsome—"no life can be dull when one is thinking about mathematics all day. Do you study mathematics?"

"No; I was at Oxford, you know."

"Then perhaps you prefer metaphysics? Though Lala Roy says that the true metaphysics, which he has tried to teach me, can only be reached by the Hindoo intellect."

"No, indeed; I have never read any metaphysics whatever. I have only got the English intellect." This he said with intent satirical, but Iris failed to understand it so, and thought it was meant for a commendable humility.

"Physical science, perhaps?"

"No, Iris. Philosophy, mathematics, physics, metaphysics, or science of any kind have I never learned, except only the science of Heraldry, which you have taught me, with a few other things."

"Oh!" She wondered how a man could exist at all without learning these things. "Not any science at all? How can any one live without some science?"

"I knew very well," he said, "that as soon as I was found out I should be despised."

"Oh no, not despised. But it seems such a pity—"

"There is another kind of life, Iris, which you do not know. You must let me teach you. It is the life of Art. If you would only condescend to show the least curiosity about me, Iris, I would try to show you something of the Art life."

"How can I show curiosity about you, Arnold? I feel none."

"No; that is just the thing which shames me. I have felt the most lively curiosity about you, and I have asked you thousands of impertinent questions."

"Not impertinent, Arnold. If you want to ask any more, pray do. I dare say you cannot understand my simple life."

"And you ask me nothing at all about myself. It isn't fair, Iris."

"Why should I? I know you already."

"You know nothing at all about me."

"Oh yes, I know you very well indeed

I knew you before you came here. You showed me yourself in your letters. You are exactly like the portrait I drew of you. I never thought, for instance, that you were an old gentleman, as you thought me."

He laughed. It was a new thing to see Iris using, even gently, the dainty weapons of satire.

"But you do not know what I am, or what is my profession, or anything at all about me."

"No; I do not care to know. All that is not part of yourself. It is outside you."

"And because you thought you knew me from those letters, you suffer me to come here and be your disciple still? Yet you gave me back my letters?"

"That was because they were written to me under a wrong impression."

"Will you have them back again?"

She shook her head.

"I know them all by heart," she said simply.

There was not the slightest sign of coquetry or flattery in her voice, or in her eyes, which met his look with clear and steady gaze.

"I cannot ask you to read my portrait to me as you drew it from those pictures."

"Why not?" She began to read him his portrait as readily as if she were stating the conclusion of a problem. "I saw that you were young and full of generous thoughts; sometimes you were indignant with things as they are, but generally you laughed at them and accepted them. It is, it seems, the nature of your friends to laugh a great deal at things which they ought to remedy if they could, not laugh at them. I thought that you wanted some strong stimulus to work; anybody could see that you were a man of kindly nature and good-breeding. You were careful not to offend by anything that you wrote, and I was certain that you were a man of honour. I trusted you, Arnold, before I saw your face, because I knew your soul."

"Trust me still, Iris," he said in rather a husky voice.

"Of course I did not know, and never thought, what sort of a man you were to look at. Yet I ought to have known that you were handsome. I should have guessed that from the very tone of your letters. A hunchback or a cripple could not have written in so light-hearted a strain, and I should have discovered, if I had thought of such a thing, that you were very well

satisfied with your personal appearance. Young men should always be that, at least, if only to give them confidence."

"Oh, Iris—oh! Do you really think me conceited?"

"I did not say that. I only said that you were satisfied with yourself. That, I understand now, was clear, from many little natural touches in your letters."

"What else did you learn?"

"Oh, a great deal—much more than I can tell you. I knew that you go into society, and I learned from you what society means; and though you tried to be sarcastic, I understood easily that you liked social pleasure."

"Was I sarcastic?"

"Was it not sarcastic to tell me how the fine ladies, who affect so much enthusiasm for art, go to see the galleries on the private-view day, and are never seen in them again? Was it not sarcastic——"

"Spare me, Iris. I will never do it again. And knowing so much, do you not desire to know more?"

"No, Arnold. I am not interested in anything else."

"But my position, my profession, my people—are you not curious to know them?"

"No. They are not you. They are accidents of yourself."

"Philosopher! But you must know more about me. I told you I was an artist. But you have never enquired whether I was a great artist or a little one."

"You are still a little artist," she said. "I know that, without being told. But perhaps you may become great when you learn to work seriously."

"I have been lazy," he replied with something like a blush, "but that is all over now. I am going to work. I will give up society. I will take my profession seriously, if only you will encourage me."

Did he mean what he said? When he came away he used at this period to ask himself that question, and was astonished at the length he had gone. With any other girl in the world, he would have been taken at his word, and either encouraged to go on, or snubbed on the spot. But Iris received these advances as if they were a confession of weakness.

"Why do you want me to encourage you?" she asked. "I know nothing about Art. Can't you encourage yourself, Arnold?"

"Iris, I must tell you something more about myself. Will you listen for a moment?"

Well, I am the son of a clergyman who now holds a colonial appointment. I have got the usual number of brothers and sisters, who are doing the usual things. I will not bore you with details about them."

"No," said Iris, "please do not."

"I am the adopted son, or ward, or whatever you please, of a certain cousin. She is a single lady with a great income, which she promises to bequeath to me in the future. In the meantime, I am to have whatever I want. Do you understand the position, Iris?"

"Yes, I think so. It is interesting, because it shows why you will never be a great artist. But it is very sad."

"A man may rise above his conditions," Iris, said Arnold meekly.

"No," she went on; "it is only the poor men who do anything good. Lala Roy says so."

"I will pretend to be poor—indeed, I am poor. I have nothing. If it were not for my cousin, I could not even profess to follow Art."

"What a pity," she said, "that you are rich! Lala Roy was rich once."

Arnold repressed an inclination to desire that Lala Roy might be kept out of the conversation.

"But he gave up all his wealth and has been happy, and a Philosopher, ever since."

"I can't give up my wealth, Iris, because I haven't got any—I owe my cousin everything. But for her, I should never even have known you."

He watched her at her work in the morning when she sat patiently answering questions, working out problems, and making papers. She showed him the letters of her pupils, exacting, excusing, petulant—sometimes dissatisfied and even ill-tempered. He watched her in the afternoon while she sewed or read. In the evening he sat with her while the two old men played their game of chess. Regularly every evening at half-past nine the Bengalee checkmated Mr. Emblem. Up to that hour he amused himself with his opponent, formed ingenious combinations, watched openings, and gradually cleared the board until he found himself as the hour of half-past nine drew near, able to propose a simple problem to his own mind, such as, "White moves first, to mate in three, four, or five moves," and then he proceeded to solve that problem, and checkmated his adversary.

No one, not even Iris, knew how Lala

Roy lived, or what he did in the daytime. It was rumoured that he had been seen at Simpson's in the Strand, but this report wanted confirmation. He had lived in Mr. Emblem's second floor for twenty years; he always paid his bills with regularity, and his long spare figure and white moustache and fez were as well known in Chelsea as any red-coated loungeur among the old veterans of the Hospital.

"It is quiet for you in the evenings," said Arnold.

"I play to them sometimes. They like to hear me play during the game. Look at them."

She sat down and played. She had a delicate touch, and played soft music, such as soothes, not excites the soul. Arnold watched her, not the old men. How was it that refinement, grace, self-possession, manners, and the culture of a lady, could be found in one who knew no ladies? But then Arnold did not know Lala Roy, nor did he understand the old book-seller.

"You are always wondering about me," she said, talking while she played; "I see it in your eyes. Can you not take me as I am, without thinking why I am different from other girls? Of course I am different, because I know none of them."

"I wish they were all like you," he said.

"No; that would be a great pity. You want girls who understand your own life, and can enter into your pursuits—you want companions who can talk to you; go back to them, Arnold, as soon as you are tired of coming here."

And yet his instinct was right which told him that the girl was not a coquette. She had no thought—not the least thought—as yet that anything was possible beyond the existing friendship. It was pleasant, but Arnold would get tired of her, and go back to his own people. Then he would remain in her memory as a Study of Character. This she did not exactly formulate, but she had that feeling. Every woman makes a study of character about every man in whom she becomes ever so little interested. But we must not get conceited, my brothers, over this fact. The converse, unhappily, does not hold true. Very few men ever study the character of a woman at all. Either they fall in love with her before they have had time to make more than a sketch, and do not afterwards pursue the subject, or they do not fall in love with her at all;

and in the latter case it hardly seems worth while to follow up a first rough draft.

"Checkmate," said Lala Roy.

The game was finished and the evening over.

"Would you like," he said, another evening, "to see my studio, or do you consider my studio outside myself?"

"I should very much like to see an artist's studio," she replied with her usual frankness, leaving it an open question whether she would not be equally pleased to see any other studio.

She came, however, accompanied by Lala Roy, who had never been in a studio before, and indeed had never looked at a picture, except with the contemptuous glance which the Philosopher bestows upon the follies of mankind. Yet he came, because Iris asked him. Arnold's studio is one of the smallest of those in Tite Street. Of course it is built of red-brick, and of course it has a noble staircase and a beautiful painting-room or studio proper all set about with bits of tapestry, armour, pictures, and china, besides the tools and properties of the craft. He had portfolios full of sketches; against the wall stood pictures, finished and unfinished; on an easel was a half-painted picture representing a group taken from a modern novel. Most painters only draw scenes from two novels—the Vicar of Wakefield and Don Quixote; but Arnold knew more. The central figure was a girl, quite unfinished—in fact, barely sketched in.

Iris looked at everything with the interest which belongs to the new and unexpected.

Arnold began to show the pictures in the portfolios. There were sketches of peasant-life in Norway and on the Continent; there were landscapes, quaint old houses, and castles; there were ships and ports; and there were heads—hundreds of heads.

"I said you might be a great artist," said Iris. "I am sure now that you will be if you choose."

"Thank you, Iris. It is the greatest compliment you could pay me."

"And what is this?" she was before the easel on which stood the unfinished picture.

"It is a scene from a novel. But I cannot get the principal face. None of the models are half good enough. I want a sweet face, a serious face, a face with deep, beautiful eyes. Iris"—it was a sudden impulse, an inspiration—"let me put your face there. Give me my first commission."

She blushed deeply. All these drawings, the multitudinous faces and heads and figures in the portfolio were a revelation to her. And just at the very moment when she discovered that Arnold was one of those who worship beauty—a thing she had never before understood—he told her that her face was so beautiful that he must put it in his picture.

"Oh, Arnold," she said, "my face would be out of place in that picture."

"Would it? Please sit down, and let me make a sketch."

He seized his crayons and began rapidly.

"What do you say, Lala Roy?" he asked by way of diversion.

"The gifts of the understanding," said the Sage, "are the treasures of the Lord; and He appointeth to every one his portion."

"Thank you," replied Arnold. "Very true and very apt, I'm sure. Iris, please, your face turned just a little. So. Ah, if I can but do some measure of justice to your eyes!"

When Iris went away, there was for the first time the least touch of restraint or self-consciousness in her. Arnold felt it. She showed it in her eyes and in the touch of her fingers when he took her hand at parting. It was then for the first time also that Arnold discovered a truth of overwhelming importance. Every new fact—everything which cannot be disputed or denied, is, we all know, of the most enormous importance. He discovered no less a truth than that he was in love with Iris. So important is this truth to a young man that it reduces the countless myriads of the world to a single pair—himself and another; it converts the most arid waste of streets into an Eden; and it blinds the eyes to ambition, riches, and success. Arnold sat down and reasoned out this truth. He said coldly and "squarely":

"This is a girl whom I have known only a fortnight or so; she lives over a second-hand bookshop; she is a teacher by profession; she knows none of the ways of society; she would doubtless be guilty of all kinds of queer things, if she were suddenly introduced to good people; probably, she would never learn our manners," with more to the same effect, which may be reasonably omitted. Then his Conscience woke up, and said quite simply: "Arnold, you are a liar." Conscience does sometimes call hard names. She is feminine, and therefore privileged to call hard names. Else we should sometimes

kick and belabour Conscience. "Arnold, don't tell more lies. You have been gradually learning to know Iris, through the wisest and sweetest letters that were ever written, for a whole year. You gradually began to know her, in fact, when you first began to interlard your letters with concealed revelations about yourself. You knew her to be sympathetic, quick, and of a most kind and tender heart. You are quite sure, though you try to disguise the fact, that she is as honest as the day, and as true as steel. As for her not being a lady, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for even thinking such a thing. Has she not been tenderly brought up by two old men who are full of honour, and truth, and all the simple virtues? Does she not look, move, and speak like the most gracious lady in the land?"—"Like a goddess," Arnold confessed.—"As for the ways and talk of society, what are these worth? and cannot they be acquired? And what are her manners save those of the most perfect refinement and purity?" Thus far Conscience. Then Arnold, or Arnold's secret *advocatus diaboli*, began upon another and quite different line. "She must have schemed at the outset to get me into her net; she is a Siren; she assumes the disguise of innocence and ignorance the better to beguile and to deceive. She has gone home to-day elated because she thinks she has landed a gentleman."

Conscience said nothing; there are some things to which Conscience has no reply in words to offer; yet Conscience pointed to the portrait of the girl, and bade the most unworthy of all lovers look upon even his own poor and meagre representation of her eyes and face, and ask whether such blasphemies could ever be forgiven.

After a self-abasement, which for shame's sake we must pass over, the young man felt happier.

Henry the Second felt much the same satisfaction the morning after his scourging at the hands of the monks, who were as muscular as they were vindictive.

CHAPTER VI. COUSIN CLARA.

THAT man who spends his days in painting a girl's portrait, in talking to her, and in gazing upon the unfinished portrait when she is not with him, and occupies his thoughts during the watches of the night in thinking about her, is perilously near to taking the last and fatal step. Flight

for such a man is the only thing left, and he so seldom thinks of flight until it is too late.

Arnold was at this point.

"I am possessed by this girl," he might have said had he put his thoughts into words. "I am haunted by her eyes; her voice lingers on my ears; I dream of her face; the touch of her fingers is like the touch of an electric battery." What symptoms are these, so common that one is almost ashamed to write them down, but the infallible symptoms of love? And yet he hesitated, not because he doubted himself any longer, but because he was not independent, and such an engagement might deprive him at one stroke of all that he possessed. Might? It certainly would. Yes; the new and beautiful studio, all the things in it, all his prospects for the future, would have to be given up. "She is worth more than that," said Arnold, "and I should find work somehow. But yet, to plunge her into poverty—and to make Clara the most unhappy of women!"

The reason why Clara would be made the most unhappy of women, was that Clara was his cousin and his benefactor, to whom he owed everything. She was the kindest of patrons, and she liked nothing so much as the lavishing upon her ward everything that he could desire. But she also, unfortunately, illustrated the truth of Chaucer's teaching, in that she loved power more than anything else, and had already mapped out Arnold's life for him.

It was his custom to call upon her daily, to use her house as his own. When they were separated, they wrote to each other every day; the relations between them were of the most intimate and affectionate kind. He advised in all her affairs, while she directed him; it was understood that he was her heir, and though she was not more than five-and-forty or so, and had, apparently, a long life still before her, so that the succession was distant, the prospect gave him importance. She had been out of town, and perhaps the fact of a new acquaintance with so obscure a person as a simple tutor by correspondence, seemed to Arnold not worth mentioning. At all events, he had not mentioned it in his daily letters.

And now she was coming home; she was actually arrived; he would see her that evening. Her last letter was lying before him.

"I parted from dear Stella yesterday.

She goes to stay with the Essex Mainwarings for a month; after that, I hope that she will give me a long visit. I do not know where one could find a sweeter girl, or one more eminently calculated to make a man happy. Beautiful, strictly speaking, she is not, perhaps; but of excellent connections, not without a portion, young, clever, and ambitious. With such a wife, my dear Arnold, a man may aspire to anything."

"To anything," repeated Arnold; "what is her notion of anything? She has arrived by this time." He looked at his watch and found it was past five. "I ought to have been at the station to meet her. I must go round and see her, and I must dine with her to-night." He sighed heavily. "It would be much pleasanter to spend the evening with Iris."

Then a carriage stopped at his door. It was his cousin, and the next minute he was receiving and giving the kiss of welcome. For his own part, he felt guilty, because he could put so little heart into that kiss, compared with all previous embraces. She was a stout, hearty little woman, who could never have been in the least beautiful, even when she was young. Now on the middle line, between forty and fifty, she looked as if her face had been chopped out of the marble by a rude but determined artist, one who knew what he wanted and would tolerate no conventional work. So that her face, at all events, was, if not unique, at least unlike any other face one had ever seen. Most faces, we know, can be reduced to certain general types—even Iris's face might be classified—while of yours, my brother, there are, no doubt, multitudes. Miss Holland, however, had good eyes—bright, clear grey—the eyes of a woman who knows what she wants and means to get it if she can.

"Well, my dear," she said, taking the one comfortable chair in the studio, "I am back again, and I have enjoyed my journey very much; we will have all the travels this evening. You are looking splendid, Arnold!"

"I am very well indeed. And you, Clara? But I need not ask."

"No, I am always well. I told you about dear Stella, did I not? I never had a more delightful companion."

"So glad you liked her."

"If only, Arnold, you would like her too. But I know"—for Arnold changed colour—"I know one must not interfere in these matters. But surely one may go so far with a young man one loves as to say,

'Here is a girl of a million'? There is not, Arnold, I declare, her equal anywhere; a clearer head I never met, or a better educated girl, or one who knows what a man can do, and how he can be helped to do it."

"Thank you, Clara," Arnold said coldly; "I dare say I shall discover the young lady's perfections in time."

"Not, I think, without some help. She is not an ordinary girl. You must draw her out, my dear boy."

"I will," he said listlessly. "I will try to draw her out, if you like."

"We talked a great deal of you, Arnold," Clara went on. "I confided to her some of my hopes and ambitions for you; and I am free to confess to you that she has greatly modified all my plans and calculations."

"Oh!" Arnold was interested in this. "But, my dear Clara, I have my profession. I must follow my profession."

"Surely—surely! Listen, Arnold, patiently. Anybody can become an artist—anybody, of course, who has the genius. And all kinds of people, gutter people, have the genius."

"The sun," said Arnold, just as if he had been Lala Roy, "shines on all alike."

"Quite so; and there is an immense enthusiasm for Art everywhere; but there is no Art leader. There is no one man recognised as the man most competent to speak on Art of every kind. Think of that. It is Stella's idea entirely. This man, when he is found, will sway enormous authority; he will become, if he has a wife able to assist him, an immense social power."

"And you want me to become that man?"

"Yes, Arnold. I do not see why you should not become that man: Cease to think of becoming President of the Royal Academy, yet go on painting; prove your genius, so as to command respect; cultivate the art of public speaking; and look about for a wife who will be your right hand. Think of this seriously. This is only a rough sketch; we can fill in the details afterwards. But think of it. Oh, my dear boy! if I were only a man, and five-and-twenty, with such a chance before me! What a glorious career is yours, if you choose! But of course you will choose. Good gracious, Arnold! who is that?"

She pointed to the canvas on the easel, where Iris's face was like the tale of Cambuscan, half-told.

"It is no one you know, Clara."

"One of your models?" She rose and examined it more closely through her glasses. "The eyes are wonderful, Arnold. They are eyes I know. As if I could ever forget them! They are the same eyes; exactly the same eyes. I have never met with any like them before. They are the eyes of my poor, lost, betrayed Claude Deseret. Where did you pick up this girl, Arnold? Is she a common model?"

"Not at all. She is not a model. She is a young lady who teaches by correspondence. She is my tutor—of course I have so often talked to you about her—who taught me the science of Heraldry, and wrote me such charming letters."

"Your tutor! You said your tutor was an old gentleman."

"So I thought, Clara. But I was wrong. My tutor is a young lady; and this is her portrait, half-finished. It does not do her any kind of justice."

"A young lady!" She looked suspiciously at Arnold, whose tell-tale cheek flushed. "A young lady! Indeed! And you have made her acquaintance."

"As you see, Clara; and she does me the honour to let me paint her portrait."

"What is her name, Arnold?"

"She is a Miss Aglen."

"Strange. The Deserets once intermarried with the Aglens. I wonder if she is any connection. They were Warwickshire Aglens. But it is impossible—a teacher by correspondence, a mere private governess! Who are her people?"

"She lives with her grandfather. I think her father was a tutor or journalist of some kind, but he is dead; and her grandfather keeps a second-hand bookshop in the King's Road close by."

"A bookshop! But you said, Arnold, that she was a young lady."

"So she is, Clara," he replied simply.

"Arnold!" For the first time in his life Arnold saw his cousin angry with him. She was constantly being angry with other people, but never before had she been angry with him. "Arnold, spare me this nonsense. If you have been playing with this shop-girl I cannot help it, and I beg that you will tell me no more about it, and do not, to my face, speak of her as a lady."

"I have not been playing with her, I think," said Arnold gravely; "I have been very serious with her."

"Everybody nowadays is a young lady. The girl who gives you a cup of tea in a

shop; the girl who dances in the ballet; the girl who makes your dresses."

"In that case, Clara, you need not mind my calling Miss Aglen a young lady."

"There is one word left, at least: women of my class are gentlewomen."

"Miss Aglen is a gentlewoman."

"Arnold, look me in the face. My dear boy, tell me, are you mad? Oh, think of my poor unhappy Claude, what he did, and what he must have suffered!"

"I know what he did. I do not know what he suffered. My case, however, is different from his. I am not engaged to anyone."

"Arnold, think of the great scheme of life I have drawn out for you. My dear boy, would you throw that all away?"

She laid her hands upon his arm and looked in his eyes with a pitiful gaze. He took her hands in his.

"My dear, every man must shape his life for himself, or must live out the life shaped for him by his Fate, not by his friends. What if I see a life more delightful to me than that of which you dream?"

"You talk of a delightful life, Arnold; I spoke of an honourable career."

"Mine will be a life of quiet work and love. Yours, Clara, would be one of noisy and troublesome work without love."

"Without love, Arnold? You are infatuated."

She sank into the chair and buried her face in her hands. First, it was her lover who had deserted her for the sake of a governess, the daughter of some London tradesman; and now her adopted son, almost the only creature she loved, for whom she had schemed and thought for nearly twenty years, was ready to give up everything for the sake of another governess, also connected with the lower forms of commercial interests.

"It is very hard, Arnold," she said. "No, don't try to persuade me. I am getting an old woman, and it is too late for me to learn that a gentleman can be happy unless he marries a lady. You might as well ask me to look for happiness with a grocer."

"Not quite," said Arnold.

"It is exactly the same thing. Pray, have you proposed to this—this young lady of the second-hand bookshop?"

"No, I have not."

"You are in love with her, however?"

"I am, Clara."

"And you intend to ask her—in the

shop, I dare say, among the second-hand books—to become your wife!”

“That is my serious intention, Clara.”

“Claude did the same thing. His father remonstrated with him in vain. He took his wife to London, where, for a time, he lived in misery and self-reproach.”

“Do you know that he reproached himself?”

“I know what must have happened when he found out his mistake. Then he went to America, where he died, no doubt in despair, although his father had forgiven him.”

“The cases are hardly parallel,” said Arnold. “Still, will you permit me to introduce Miss Aglen to you, if she should do me the honour of accepting me? Be generous, Clara. Do not condemn the poor girl without seeing her.”

“I condemn no one—I judge no one, not even you, Arnold. But I will not receive that young woman.”

“Very well, Clara.”

“How shall you live, Arnold?” she asked coldly.

It was the finishing stroke—the dismissal.

“I suppose we shall not marry; but, of course, I am talking as if——”

“As if she was ready to jump into your arms. Go on.”

“We shall not marry until I have made some kind of a beginning in my work. Clara, let us have no further explanation. I understand perfectly well. But, my dear Clara,” he laid his arm upon her neck and kissed her, “I shall not let you quarrel with me. I owe you too much, and I love you too well. I am always your most faithful of servants.”

“No; till you are married—then—Oh, Arnold! Arnold!”

A less strong-minded woman would have burst into tears. Clara did not. She got into her carriage and drove home. She spent a miserable evening and a sleepless night. But she did not cry.

CHAPTER VII. ON BATTERSEA TERRACE.

IF a woman were to choose any period of her life which she pleased, for indefinite prolongation, she would certainly select that period which lies between the first perception of the first symptoms—when she begins to understand that a man has begun to love her—and the day when he tells her so.

Yet women who look back to this period with so much fondness and regret forget

their little tremors and misgivings—the self-distrust, the hopes and fears, the doubts and perplexities, which troubled this time. For although it is acknowledged, and has been taught by all philosophers from King Lemuel and Lao-Kiun downwards, that no greater prize can be gained by any man than the love of a good woman, which is better than a Peerage—better than a Bonanza mine—better than Name and Fame, Kudos and the newspaper paragraph, and is arrived at by much less exertion, being indeed the special gift of the gods to those they love; yet all women perfectly understand the other side to this great truth—namely, that no greater happiness can fall to any woman than the love of a good man. So that, in all the multitudinous and delightful courtships which go on around us, and in our midst, there is, on both sides, both with man and with maid, among those who truly reach to the right understanding of what this great thing may mean, a continual distrust of self, with humility and anxiety. And when, as sometimes happens, a girl has been brought up in entire ignorance of love, so that the thought of it has never entered her head, the thing itself, when it falls upon her, is overwhelming, and enfolds her as with a garment from head to foot, and, except to her lover, she becomes as a sealed fountain. I know not how long this season of expectation would have lasted for Iris, but for Arnold's conversation with his cousin, which persuaded him to speak and bring matters to a final issue. To this girl, living as secluded as if she was in an Oriental Harem, who had never thought of love as a thing possible for herself, the consciousness that Arnold loved her was bewildering and astonishing, and she waited, knowing that sooner or later something would be said, but trembling for fear that it should be said.

After all, it was Lala Roy, and not Clara, who finally determined Arnold to wait no longer.

He came every day to the studio with Iris when she sat for her portrait. This was in the afternoon. But he now got into the habit of coming in the morning, and would sit in silence looking on. He came partly because he liked the young man, and partly because the painter's art was new to him, and it amused him to watch a man giving his whole time and intellect to the copying of faces and things on canvas. Also he was well aware by this time that it was not to see Mr. Emblem or himself that

Arnold spent every evening at the house, and he was amused to watch the progress of an English courtship. In India, we know, they manage matters differently, and so as to give the bridegroom no more trouble than is necessary. This young man, however, took, he observed, the most wonderful pains and the most extraordinary trouble to please.

"Do you know, Lala Roy," Arnold said one morning after a silence of three hours or so, "do you know that this is going to be the portrait of the most beautiful woman in the world, and the best?"

"It is well," said the Philosopher, "when a young man desires virtue as well as beauty."

"You have known her all her life. Don't trouble yourself to speak, Lala. You can nod your head if there isn't a maxim ready. You began to lodge in the house twenty years ago, and you have seen her every day since. If she is not the best, as well as the most beautiful girl in the world, you ought to know and can contradict me. But you do know it."

"Happy is the man," said the Sage, "who shall call her wife; happy the children who shall call her mother."

"I suppose, Lala," Arnold went on with an ingenuous blush, "I suppose that you have perceived that—that—in fact—I love her."

The Philosopher inclined his head.

"Do you think—you who know her so well—that she suspects or knows it?"

"The thoughts of a maiden are secret thoughts. As well may one search for the beginnings of a river as enquire into the mind of a woman. Their ways are not our ways, nor are their thoughts ours, nor have we wit to understand, nor have they tongue to utter, the things they think. I know not whether she suspects."

"Yet you have had experience, Lala Roy?"

A smile stole over the Sage's features.

"In the old days when I was young, I had experience, as all men have. I have had many wives. Yet to me, as to all others, the thoughts of the Harem are unknown."

"Yet, Iris—surely you know the thoughts of Iris, your pupil."

"I know only that her heart is the abode of goodness, and that she knows not any evil thought. Young man, beware. Trouble not the clear fountain."

"Heaven knows," said Arnold, "I would not——" And here he stopped.

"Youth," said the Sage presently, "is the season for love. Enjoy the present happiness. Woman is made to be loved. Receive with gratitude what Heaven gives. The present moment is your own. Defer not until the evening what you may accomplish at noon."

With these words the Oracle became silent, and Arnold sat down and began to think it all over again.

An hour later he presented himself at the house in the King's Road. Iris was alone, and she was playing.

"You, Arnold? It is early for you."

"Forgive me, Iris, for breaking in on your afternoon; but I thought—it is a fine afternoon—I thought that, perhaps—you have never taken a walk with me."

She blushed, I think in sympathy with Arnold, who looked confused and stammered, and then she said she would go with him.

They left the King's Road by the Royal Avenue, where the leaves were already thin and yellow, and passed through the Hospital and its broad grounds down to the river-side; then they turned to the right, and walked along the Embankment, where are the great new red houses, to Cheyne Walk, and so across the Suspension Bridge. Arnold did not speak one word the whole way. His heart was so full that he could not trust himself to speak. Who would not be four-and-twenty again, even with all the risks and dangers of life before one, the set traps, the gaping holes, and the treacherous quicksands, if it were only to feel once more the overwhelming spirit of the mysterious goddess of the golden cestus? In silence they walked side by side over the bridge. Half-way across, they stopped and looked up the river. The tide was running in with a swift current, and the broad river was nearly at the full; the strong September sun fell upon the water, which was broken into little waves under a fresh breeze meeting the current from the north-west. There were lighters and barges majestically creeping up stream, some with brown three-cornered sails set in the bows and stern, some slowly moving with the tide, their bows kept steady by long oars, and some, lashed one to the other, forming a long train, and pulled along by a noisy little tug, all paddle-wheel and engine. There was a sculler vigorously practising for his next race, and dreaming, perhaps, of sending a challenge to Hanlan; there were some boys in a rowing-boat, laughing and

splashing each other; on the north bank there was the garden of the Embankment, with its young trees still green, for the summer lasted into late September this year, and, beyond, the red brick tower of the old Church, with its flagpost on the top. These details are never so carefully marked as when one is anxious, and fully absorbed in things of great importance. Perhaps Arnold had crossed the bridge a hundred times before, but to-day, for the first time, he noticed the common things of the river. One may be an artist, and yet may miss the treasures that lie at the very feet. This is a remark which occurs to one with each new Academy Show. With every tide the boats go up and down with their brown sails, and always the Tower of Chelsea Church rises above the trees, and the broad river never forgets to sparkle and to glow in the sunshine when it gets the chance. Such common things are for the most part unheeded, but, when the mind is anxious and full, they force themselves upon one. Arnold watched boats, and river, and sunshine on the sails, with a strange interest and wonder, as one sees visions in a dream. He had seen all these things before, yet now he noticed them for the first time, and all the while he was thinking what he should say to Iris, and how he should approach the subject. I know not whether Iris, like him, saw one thing and noticed another. The thoughts of a maiden, as Lala Roy said, are secret thoughts. She looked upon the river from the bridge with Arnold. When he turned, she turned with him, and neither spoke.

They left the bridge, and passed through the wooden gate at the Battersea end of it, and across the corner where the stone columns lie, like an imitation of Tadmor in the Desert, and so to the broad Terrace overlooking the river.

There is not, anywhere, a more beautiful Terrace than this of Battersea Park, especially when the tide is high. Before it lies the splendid river, with the barges which Arnold had seen from the bridge. They are broad, and flat, and sometimes squat, and sometimes black with coal, and sometimes they go up and down sideways, in lubberly Dutch fashion, but they are always picturesque; and beyond the river is the Embankment, with its young trees, which will before many years be tall and stately trees; and behind the trees are the new red palaces; and above the houses, at this time of the year and day, are the

flying clouds, already coloured with the light of the sinking sun. Behind the Terrace are the trees and lawns of the best-kept Park in London.

In the afternoon of a late September day, there are not many who walk in these gardens. Arnold and Iris had the Terrace almost to themselves, save for half-a-dozen girls with children, and two or three old men making the most of the last summer they were ever likely to see, though it would have been cruel to tell them so.

"This is your favourite walk, Iris," said Arnold at last, breaking the silence.

"Yes; I come here very often. It is my garden. Sometimes in the winter, and when the east wind blows up the river, I have it all to myself."

"A quiet life, Iris," he said, "and a happy life."

"Yes; a happy life."

"Iris, will you change it for a life which will not be so quiet?" He took her hand, but she made no reply. "I must tell you, Iris, because I cannot keep it from you any longer. I love you—oh, my dear, I cannot tell you how I love you."

"Oh, Arnold!" she whispered. It had come, the thing she feared to hear!

"May I go on? I have told you now the most important thing, and the rest matters little. Oh, Iris, may I go on and tell you all?"

"Go on," she said; "tell me all."

"As for telling you everything," he said with a little laugh, "that is no new thing. I have told you all that is in my mind for a year and more. It seems natural that I should tell you this too, even if it did not concern you at all, but some other girl; though that would be impossible. I love you, Iris; I love you—I should like to say nothing more. But I must tell you as well that I am quite a poor man; I am an absolute pauper; I have nothing at all—no money, no work, nothing. My studio and all must go back to her; and yet, Iris, in spite of this, I am so selfish as to tell you that I love you. I would give you, if I could, the most delightful palace in the world, and I offer you a share in the uncertain life of an artist, who does not know whether he has any genius, or whether he is fit even to be called an artist."

She gave him her hand with the frankness which was her chief charm, and with a look in her eyes so full of trust and truth that his heart sank within him for very fear lest he should prove unworthy of so much confidence.

"Oh, Arnold," she said, "I think that I have loved you all along, ever since you began to write to me. And yet I never thought that love would come to me."

He led her into that bosky grove set with seats convenient for lovers, which lies romantically close to the Italian Restaurant, where they sell the cocoa and the ginger-beer. There was no one in the place beside themselves, and here, among the falling leaves, and in a solitude as profound as on the top of a Dartmoor Tor, Arnold told the story of his love again, and with greater coherence, though even more passion.

"Oh," said Iris again, "how could you love me, Arnold—how could you love any girl so? It is a shame, Arnold; we are not worth so much. Could any woman," she thought, "be worth the wealth of passion and devotion which her lover poured out for her?"

"My tutor," he went on, "if you only knew what things you have taught me, a man of experience! If I admired you when I thought you must be a man, and pictured an old scholar full of books and wisdom, what could I do when I found that a young girl had written those letters? You gave mine back to me; did you think that I would ever part with yours? And you owned—oh, Iris, what would not the finished woman of the world give to have the secret of your power?—you owned that you knew all my letters, every one, by heart. And after all, you will love me, your disciple and pupil, and a man who has his way to make from the very beginning and first round of the ladder. Think, Iris, first. Is it right to throw away so much upon a man who is worth so little?"

"But I am glad that you are poor. If you were rich I should have been afraid—oh, not of you, Arnold—never of you, but of your people. And, besides, it is so good—oh, so very good for a young man—a young man of the best kind, not my cousin's kind—to be poor. Nobody ought ever to be allowed to become rich before he is fifty years of age at the very least. Because now you will have to work in earnest, and you will become a great artist—yes, a truly great artist, and we shall be proud of you."

"You shall make of me what you please, and what you can. For your sake, Iris, I wish I were another Raphael. You are my mistress and my queen. Bid me to die and I will dare—Iris, I swear

that the words of the extravagant old song are real to me."

"Nay," she said, "not your Queen, but your servant always. Surely love cannot command. But, I think," she added softly, with a tender blush; "I think—nay, I am sure and certain that it can obey."

He stooped and kissed her fingers.

"My love," he murmured; "my love—my love!"

The shadows lengthened and the evening fell; but those two foolish people sat side by side, and hand in hand, and what they said further we need not write down, because to tell too much of what young lovers whisper to each other is a kind of sacrilege.

At last Arnold became aware that the sun was actually set, and he sprang to his feet.

They walked home again across the Suspension Bridge. In the western sky was hanging a huge bank of cloud all bathed in purple, red, and gold; the river was ablaze; the barges floated in a golden haze; the light shone on their faces, and made them all glorious, like the face of Moses, for they, too, had stood—nay, they were still standing—at the very gates of Heaven.

"See, Iris," said the happy lover, "the day is done; your old life is finished; it has been a happy time, and it sets in glory and splendour. The red light in the west is a happy omen of the day to come."

So he took her by the hand and led her over the river, and then to his own studio in Tite Street. There, in the solemn twilight, he held her in his arms, and renewed the vows of love with kisses and fond caress.

"Iris, my dear—my dear—you are mine and I am yours. What have I done to deserve this happy fate?"

CHAPTER VIII. THE DISCOVERY.

AT nine o'clock that evening, Mr. Emblem looked up from the chess-board.

"Where is Mr. Arbuthnot this evening, my dear?" he asked.

It would be significant in some houses when a young man is expected every evening. Iris blushed, and said that perhaps he was not coming. But he was, and his step was on the stair as she spoke.

"You are late, Mr. Arbuthnot," said Mr. Emblem reproachfully; "you are late, sir, and somehow we get no music now until you come. Play us something, Iris. It is my move, Lala——"

Iris opened the piano and Arnold sat down beside her, and their eyes met. There was in each the consciousness of what had passed.

"I shall speak to him to-night, Iris," Arnold whispered. "I have already written to my cousin. Do not be hurt if she does not call upon you."

"Nothing of that sort will hurt me," Iris said, being ignorant of social ways, and without the least ambition to rise in the world. "If your cousin does not call upon me I shall not be disappointed. Why should she want to know me? But I am sorry, Arnold, that she is angry with you."

Lala Roy just then found himself in presence of a most beautiful problem—white to move and checkmate in three moves. Mr. Emblem found the meshes of fate closing round him earlier than usual, and both bent their heads closely over the table.

"Checkmate!" said Lala Roy. "My friend, you have played badly this evening."

"I have played badly," Mr. Emblem replied, "because to-morrow will be an important day for Iris, and for myself. A day, Iris, that I have been looking forward to for eighteen years, ever since I got your father's last letter, written upon his death-bed. It seems a long time, but like a lifetime," said the old man of seventy-five, "it is as nothing when it is gone. Eighteen years, and you were a little thing of three, child!"

"What is going to happen to me, grandfather, except that I shall be twenty-one?"

"We shall see to-morrow. Patience, my dear—patience."

He spread out his hands and laughed. What was going to happen to himself was a small thing compared with the restoration of Iris to her own.

"Mr. Emblem," said Arnold, "I also have something of importance to say."

"You, too, Mr. Arbuthnot? Cannot yours wait also until to-morrow?"

"No; it is too important. It cannot wait an hour."

"Well, sir"—Mr. Emblem pushed up his spectacles and leaned back in his chair—"well, Mr. Arbuthnot, let us have it."

"I think you may guess what I have to say, Mr. Emblem. I am sure that Lala Roy has already guessed it."

The Philosopher inclined his head in assent.

"It is that I have this afternoon asked

Iris to marry me, Mr. Emblem. And she has consented."

"Have you consented, Iris, my dear?" said her grandfather.

She placed her hand in Arnold's for reply.

"Do you think you know him well enough, my dear?" Mr. Emblem asked gravely, looking at her lover. "Marriage is a serious thing; it is a partnership for life. Children, think well before you venture on the happiness or ruin of your whole lives. And you are so young. What a pity—what a thousand pities that people were not ordained to marry at seventy or so!"

"We have thought well," said Arnold. "Iris has faith in me."

"Then, young man, I have nothing to say. Iris will marry to please herself, and I pray that she may be happy. As for you, I like your face and your manners, but I do not know who you are, nor what your means may be. Remember that I am poor—I am so poor—I can tell you all now, that to-morrow we shall—well, patience—to-morrow I shall most likely have my very stock seized and sold."

"Your stock sold? Oh, grandfather!" cried Iris; "and you did not tell me! And I have been so happy."

"Friend," said Lala, "was it well to hide this from me?"

"Foolish people," Mr. Emblem went on, "have spread reports that I am rich, and have saved money for Iris. It is not true, Mr. Arbuthnot. I am not rich. Iris will come to you empty-handed."

"And as for me, I have nothing," said Arnold, "except a pair of hands and all the time there is. So we have all to gain and nothing to lose."

"You have your profession," said Iris, "and I have mine. Grandfather, do not fear, even though we shall all four become poor together."

It seemed natural to include Lala Roy, who had been included with them for twenty years.

"As for Iris being empty-handed," said Arnold, "how can that ever be? Why, she carries in her hands an inexhaustible cornucopia, full of precious things."

"My dear," said the old man, holding out his arms to her, "I could not keep you always. Some day I knew you would leave me; it is well that you should leave me when I am no longer able to keep a roof over your head."

"But we shall find a roof for you, grandfather, somewhere. We shall never part."

"The best of girls always," said Mr. Emblem; "the best of girls. Mr. Arbuthnot, you are a happy man."

Then the Sage lifted up his voice and said solemnly:

"On her tongue dwelleth music; the sweetness of honey floweth from her lips; humility is like a crown of glory about her head; her eye speaketh softness and love; her husband putteth his heart in her bosom and findeth joy."

"Oh, you are all too good to me," murmured Iris.

"A friend of mine," said Mr. Emblem, "now, like nearly all my friends, beneath the sod, used to say that a good marriage was a happy blending of the finest Wallsend with the most delicate Silkstone. But he was in the coal trade. For my own part I have always thought that it is like the binding of two scarce volumes into one."

"Oh, not second-hand volumes, grandfather," said Iris.

"I don't know. Certainly not new ones. Not volumes under one-and-twenty, if you please. Mr. Arbuthnot, I am glad; you will know why very soon. I am very glad that Iris made her choice before her twenty-first birthday. Whatever may happen now, no one can say that either of you were influenced by any expectations. You both think yourselves paupers; well, I say nothing, because I know nothing. But, children, if a great thing happen to you, and that before four-and-twenty hours have passed, be prepared—be prepared, I say—to receive it with moderate rejoicing."

"To-morrow?" Iris asked. "Why to-morrow? Why not to-night, if you have a secret to tell us?"

"Your father enjoined in his last letter to wait till you were twenty-one. The eve of your birthday, however, is the same thing as your birthday. We will open the papers to-night. What I have to tell you, Iris, shall be told in the presence of your lover, whatever it is—good or bad."

He led the way downstairs into the back shop. Here he lit the gas, and began to open his case, slowly and cautiously.

"Eighteen years ago, Iris, my child, I received your father's last letter, written on his death-bed. This I have already told you. He set down, in that letter, several things which surprised me very much. We shall come to these things presently. He also laid down certain instructions for your bringing up, my dear. I was, first of all, to give you as good an education as I could afford; I was to keep you as much as

possible separated from companions who might not be thought afterwards fit to be the friends of a young lady. You have had as good an education as Lala Roy and I could devise between us. From him you have learned mathematics, so as to steady your mind and make you exact; and you have learned the science of Heraldry from me, so that you may at once step into your own place in the polite world, where, no doubt, it is a familiar and a necessary study. You have also learned music, because that is an accomplishment which every one should possess. What more can any girl want for any station? My dear, I am happy to think that a gentleman is your lover. Let him tell us, now—Lala Roy and me—to our very faces, if he thinks we have, between us, made you a lady."

Arnold stooped and kissed her hand.

"There is no more perfect lady," he said, "in all the land."

"Iris's father, Mr. Arbuthnot, was a gentleman of honourable and ancient family, and I will tell you, presently, as soon as I find it out myself, his real name. As for his coat-of-arms, he bore Quarterly, first and fourth, two roses and a boar's head erect; second and third, gules and fesse between—strange, now, that I have forgotten what it was between. Everybody calls himself a gentleman nowadays; even Mr. Chalker, who is going to sell me up, I suppose; but everybody, if you please, is not armiger. Iris, your father was armiger. I suppose I am a gentleman on Sundays, when I go to church with Iris, and wear a black coat. But your father, my dear, though he married my daughter, was a gentleman by birth. And one who knows Heraldry respects a gentleman by birth." He laid his hand now on the handle of the safe, as if the time were nearly come for opening it, but not quite. "He sent me, with this last letter, a small parcel for you, my dear, not to be opened until you reached the age of twenty-one. As for the person who had succeeded to his inheritance, she was to be left in peaceable possession for a reason which he gave—quite a romantic story, which I will tell you presently—until you came of age. He was very urgent on this point. If, however, any disaster of sickness or misfortune fell upon me, I was to act in your interests at once, without waiting for time. Children," the old man added solemnly, "by the blessing of Heaven—I cannot take it as anything less—I have been spared in health and fortune

until this day. Now let me depart in peace, for my trust is expired, and my child is safe, her inheritance secured, with a younger and a better protector." He placed the key in the door of the safe. "I do not know, mind," he said, still hesitating to take the final step; "I do not know the nature of the inheritance; it may be little or may be great. The letter does not inform me on this point. I do not even know the name of the testator, my son-in-law's father. Nor do I know the name of my daughter's husband. I do not even know your true name, Iris, my child. But it is not Aglen."

"Then, have I been going under a false name all my life?"

"It was the name your father chose to bear for reasons which seemed good and sufficient to him, and these are part of the story which I shall have to tell you. Will you have this story first, or shall we first open the safe and read the contents of the parcel?"

"First," said Arnold, "let us sit down and look in each other's faces."

It was a practical suggestion. But, as it proved, it was an unlucky one, because it deprived them of the story.

"Iris," he said, while they waited, "this is truly wonderful!"

"Oh, Arnold! What am I to do with an inheritance?"

"That depends on what it is. Perhaps it is a landed estate; in which case we shall not be much better off, and can go on with our work; perhaps there will be houses; perhaps it will be thousands of pounds, and perhaps hundreds. Shall we build a castle in the air to suit our inheritance?"

"Yes; let us pretend. Oh, grandfather, stop one moment! Our castle, Arnold, shall be, first of all, the most beautiful studio in the world for you. You shall have tapestry, blue china, armour, lovely glass, soft carpets, carved doors and painted panels, a tall mantelshelf, old wooden cabinets, silver cups, and everything else what one ought to like, and you shall choose everything for yourself, and never get tired of it. But you must go on painting; you must never stop working, because we must be proud of you. Oh, but I have not done yet. My grandfather is to have two rooms for himself, which he can fill with the books he will spend his time in collecting; Lala Roy will have two more rooms, quite separate, where he can sit by him-

self whenever he does not choose to sit with me; I shall have my own study to myself, where I shall go on reading mathematics; and we shall all have, between us, the most beautiful dining-room and drawing-room that you ever saw; and a garden and a fountain; and—yes—money to give to people who are not so fortunate as ourselves. Will that do, Arnold?"

"Yes, but you have almost forgotten yourself, dear. There must be carriages for you, and jewels, and dainty things all your own, and a boudoir, and nobody shall think of doing or saying anything in the house at all, except for your pleasure; will that do, Iris?"

"I suppose we shall have to give parties of some kind, and to go to them. Perhaps one may get to like society. You will teach me lawn-tennis, Arnold; and I should like, I think, to learn dancing. I suppose I must leave off making my own dresses, though I know that I shall never be so well dressed if I do. And about the cakes and puddings—but, oh, there is enough pretending."

"It is difficult," said Lala Roy, "to bear adversity. But to be temperate in prosperity is the height of wisdom."

"And now suppose, Iris," said Arnold, "that the inheritance, instead of being thousands a year, is only a few hundreds."

"Ah, then, Arnold, it will be ever so much simpler. We shall have something to live upon until you begin to make money for us all."

"Yes; that is very simple. But suppose, again, that the inheritance is nothing but a small sum of money."

"Why, then," said Iris, "we will give it all to grandfather, who will pay off his creditor, and we will go on as if nothing had happened."

"Child!" said Mr. Emblem, "do you think that I would take your little all?"

"And suppose, again," Arnold went on, "that the inheritance turns out a delusion, and that there is nothing at all?"

"That cannot be supposed," said Mr. Emblem quickly; "that is absurd!"

"If it were," said Iris, "we shall only be, to-morrow, just exactly what we are to-day. I am a teacher by correspondence, with five pupils. Arnold is looking for art-work which will pay; and between us, my dear grandfather and Lala Roy, we are going to see that you want nothing."

Always Lala Roy with her grandfather, as

if their interests were identical, and, indeed, he had lived so long with them that Iris could not separate the two old men.

"We will all live together," Iris continued, "and when our fortune is made we will all live in a palace. And now, grandfather, that we have relieved our feelings, shall we have the story and the opening of the papers in the safe?"

"Which will you have first?" Mr. Emblem asked again.

"Oh, the safe," said Arnold. "The story can wait. Let us examine the contents of the safe."

"The story," said Mr. Emblem, "is nearly all told in your father's letter, my dear. But there is a little that I would tell you first, before I read that letter. You know, Iris, that I have never been rich; my shop has kept me up till now, but I have never been able to put by money. Well—my daughter Alice, your poor mother, my dear, who was as good and clever as you are, was determined to earn her own living, and so she went out as a governess. And one day she came home with her husband; she had been married the day before, and she told me they had very little money, and her husband was a scholar and a gentleman, and wanted to get work by writing. He got some, but not enough, and they were always in a poor way, until one day he got a letter from America—it was while the Civil War was raging—from an old Oxford friend, inviting him to emigrate and try fortune as a journalist out there. He went, and his wife was to join him. But she died, my dear; your mother died, and a year later I had your father's last letter, which I am now going to read to you."

"One moment, sir," said Arnold. "Before you open the safe and take out the papers, remember that Iris and I can take nothing—nothing at all for ourselves until all your troubles are tided over."

"Children—children," cried Mr. Emblem.

"Go, my son, to the Desert," observed the Sage, standing solemnly upright like a Prophet of Israel. "Observe the young stork of the wilderness, how he beareth on his wings his aged sire and supplieth him with food. The piety of a child is sweeter than the incense of Persia offered to the sun; yea, more delicious is it than the odours from a field of Arabian spice."

"Thank you, Lala," said Mr. Emblem. "And now, children, we will discover the mystery."

He unlocked the safe and threw it open with somewhat of a theatrical air. "The roll of papers." He took it out. "For Iris, to be opened on her twenty-first birthday. And this is the eve of it. But where is the letter? I tied the letter round it, with a piece of tape. Very strange. I am sure I tied the letter with a piece of tape. Perhaps it was—Where is the letter?"

He peered about in the safe; there was nothing else in it except a few old account-books; but he could not find the letter! Where could it be?

"I remember," he said—"most distinctly I remember tying up the letter with the parcel. Where can it be gone to?"

A feeling of trouble to come seized him. He was perfectly sure he had tied up the letter with the parcel, and here was the parcel without the letter, and no one had opened the safe except himself.

"Never mind about the letter, grandfather," said Iris; "we shall find that afterwards."

"Well, then, let us open the parcel."

It was a packet about the size of a crown-octavo volume, in brown paper, carefully fastened up with gum, and on the face of it was a white label inscribed: "For Iris, to be opened on her twenty-first birthday." Everybody in turn took it, weighed it, so to speak, looked at it curiously, and read the legend. Then they returned it to Mr. Emblem, who laid it before him and produced a penknife. With this, as carefully and solemnly as if he were offering up a sacrifice or performing a religious function, he cut the parcel straight through.

"After eighteen years," he said; "after eighteen years. The ink will be faded and the papers yellow. But we shall see the certificates of the marriage and of your baptism, Iris; there will also be letters to different people, and a true account of the rupture with his father, and the cause, of which his letter spoke. And of course we shall find out what was his real name and what is the kind of inheritance which has been waiting for you so long, my dear. Now then."

The covering in case of the packet was a kind of stiff cardboard or millboard, within brown paper. Mr. Emblem laid it open. It was full of folded papers. He took up the first and opened it. The paper was blank. The next, it was blank; the third, it was blank; the fourth, and fifth, and sixth, and so on throughout. The case, which had been waiting so long, waiting

for eighteen years, to be opened on Iris's twenty-first birthday, was full of blank papers. They were all half sheets of note-paper.

Mr. Emblem looked surprised at the first two or three papers; then he turned pale; then he rushed at the rest. When he had opened all, he stared about him with bewilderment.

"Where is the letter?" he asked again. Then he began with trembling hands to tear out the contents of the safe and spread them upon the table. The letter was nowhere.

"I am certain," he said, for the tenth time, "I am quite certain that I tied up the letter with red tape, outside the packet. And no one has been at the safe except me."

"Tell us," said Arnold, "the contents of the letter as well as you remember them. Your son-in-law was known to you under the name of Aglen, which was not his real name. Did he tell you his real name?"

"No."

"What did he tell you? Do you remember the letter?"

"I remember every word of the letter."

"If you dictate it, I will write it down. That may be a help."

Mr. Emblem began quickly, and as if he was afraid of forgetting:

"When you read these lines, I shall be in the Silent Land, whither Alice, my wife, has gone before me."

Then Mr. Emblem began to stammer.

"In one small thing we deceived you, Alice and I. My name is not Aglen—is not Aglen——"

And here a strange thing happened. His memory failed him at this point.

"Take time," said Arnold; "there is no hurry."

Mr. Emblem shook his head.

"I shall remember the rest to-morrow, perhaps," he said.

"Is there anything else you have to help us?" asked Arnold; "never mind the letter, Mr. Emblem. No doubt that will come back presently. You see we want to find out, first, who Iris's father really was, and what is her real name. There was his coat-of-arms. That will connect her with some family, though it may be a family with many branches."

"Yes—oh yes! his coat-of-arms. I have seen his signet-ring a dozen times. Yes, his coat; yes, first and fourth, two roses and a boar's head erect; second and third—I forget."

"Humph! Was there anyone who knew him before he was married?"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Emblem sat up eagerly. "Yes, there is—there is; he is my oldest customer. But I forgot his name. I have forgotten everything. Perhaps I shall get back my memory to-morrow. But I am old. Perhaps it will never get back."

He leaned his head upon his hands, and stared about him with bewildered eyes.

"I do not know, young man," he said presently, addressing Arnold, "who you are. If you come from Mr. Chalker, let me tell you it is a day too soon. To-morrow we will speak of business." Then he sprung to his feet suddenly, struck with a thought which pierced him like a dagger. "To-morrow! It is the day when they will come to sell me up. Oh, Iris! what did that matter when you were safe? Now we are all paupers together—all paupers."

He fell back in his chair white and trembling. Iris soothed him; kissed his cheek and pressed his hand; but the terror and despair of bankruptcy were upon him. This is an awful spectre, which is ever ready to appear before the man who has embarked his all in one venture. A disastrous season, two or three unlucky ventures, a succession of bad debts, and the grisly spectre stands before them. He had no terror for the old man so long as he thought that Iris was safe. But now——

"Idle talk, Iris—idle talk, child," he said, when they tried to comfort him. "How can a girl make money by teaching? Idle talk, young man. How can money be made by painting? It's as bad a trade as writing. How can money be made anyhow but in an honest shop? And to-morrow I shall have no shop, and we shall all go into the street together!"

Presently, when lamentations had yielded to despair, they persuaded him to go to bed. It was past midnight. Iris went upstairs with him, while Lala Roy and Arnold waited down below. And then Arnold made a great discovery. He began to examine the folded papers which were in the packet. I think he had some kind of vague idea that they might contain secret and invisible writing. They were all sheets of note-paper, of the same size, folded in the same way—namely, doubled as if for a square envelope. On holding one to the light, he read the water-mark:

HIEROGLYPHICA
A Vegetable Vellum.
M. S. and Co.

They all had the same water-mark. He showed the thing to the Hindoo, who did not understand what it meant.

Then Iris came down again. Her grandfather was sleeping. Like a child, he fell asleep the moment his head fell upon the pillow.

"Iris," he said, "this is no delusion of your grandfather's. The parcel has been robbed."

"How do you know, Arnold?"

"The stupid fellow who stole and opened the packet no doubt thought he was wonderfully clever to fill it up again with paper. But he forgot that the packet has been lying for eighteen years in the safe, and that this note-paper was made the day before yesterday."

"How do you know that?"

"You can tell by the look and feel of the paper; they did not make paper like this twenty years ago; besides, look at the water-mark;" he held it to the light, and Iris read the mystic words. "That is the fashion of to-day. One House issues a new kind of paper, with a fancy name, and another imitates them. To-morrow, I will ascertain exactly when this paper was made."

"But who would steal it, Arnold? Who could steal it?"

"It would not probably be of the least use to anyone. But it might be stolen in order to sell it back. We may see an advertisement carefully worded, guarded, or perhaps—Iris, who had access to the place, when your grandfather was out?"

"No one but James, the shopman. He has been here five-and-twenty years. He would not, surely, rob his old master. No one else comes here except the customers and Cousin Joe."

"Joe is not, I believe, quite——"

"Joe is a very bad man. He has done dreadful things. But then, even if Joe were bad enough to rob the safe, how could he get at it? My grandfather never leaves it unlocked. Oh, Arnold, Arnold, that all this trouble should fall upon us on the very day——"

"My dear, is it not better that it should fall upon you when I am here, one more added to your advisers? If you have lost a fortune, I have found one. Think that you have given it to me."

"Oh, the fortune may go," she said. "The future is ours, and we are young. But who shall console my grandfather in his old age for his bankruptcy?"

"As the stream," said Lala Roy, "which

passeth from the mountains to the ocean, kisseth every meadow on its way, yet tarries not in any place, so Fortune visits the sons of men; she is unstable as the wind; who shall hold her? Let not adversity tear off the wings of hope."

They could do nothing more. Arnold replaced the paper in the packet, and gave it to Iris; they put back the ledgers and account-books in the safe, and locked it up, and then they went upstairs.

"You shall go to bed, Iris," said Arnold, "and you, too, Lala Roy. I shall stay here, in case Mr. Emblem should—should want anything."

He was, in reality, afraid that "something would happen" to the old man. His sudden loss of memory, his loss of self-control when he spoke of his bankruptcy, the confusion of his words, told clearly of a mind unhinged. He could not go away and leave Iris with no better protection than one other weak old man.

He remained, but Iris sat with him, and in the silent watches of the night they talked about the future.

Under every roof are those who talk about the future, and those who think about the past; so the shadow of death is always with us and the sunshine of life. Not without reason is the Roman Catholic Altar incomplete without a bone of some dead man. As for the thing which had been stolen, that affected them but little. What does it matter—the loss of what was promised but five minutes since?

It was one o'clock in the morning when Lala Roy left them. They sat at the window, hand-in-hand, and talked. The street below them was very quiet; now and then a late cab broke the silence, or the tramp of a policeman; but there were no other sounds. They sat in darkness because they wanted no light. The hours sped too swiftly for them. At five the day began to dawn.

"Iris," said Arnold, "leave me now, and try to sleep a little. Shall we ever forget this night of sweet and tender talk?"

When she was gone, he began to be aware of footsteps overhead in the old man's room. What was he going to do? Arnold waited at the door. Presently the door opened, and he heard careful steps upon the stairs. They were the steps of Mr. Emblem himself. He was fully dressed, with his usual care and neatness, his black silk stock buckled behind, and his white hair brushed.

"Ah, Mr. Arbuthnot," he said cheerfully, "you are early this morning!" as if it was quite a usual thing for his friends to look in at six in the morning.

"You are going down to the shop, Mr. Emblem?"

"Yes, certainly—to the shop. Pray come with me."

Arnold followed him.

"I have just remembered," said the old man, "that last night we did not look on the floor. I will have one more search for the letter, and then, if I cannot find it, I will write it all out—every word. There is not much, to be sure, but the story is told without the names."

"Tell me the story, Mr. Emblem, while you remember it."

"All in good time, young man. Youth is impatient."

He drew up the blind and let in the morning light; then he began his search for the letter on the floor, going on his hands and knees, and peering under the table and chairs with a candle. At length he desisted.

"I tied it up," he said, "with the parcel, with red tape. Very well—we must do without it. Now, Mr. Arbuthnot, my plan is this. First, I will dictate the letter. This will give you the outlines of the story. Next, I will send you to—to my old customer, who can tell you my son-in-law's real name. And then I will describe his coat-of-arms. My memory was never so clear and good as I feel it to-day. Strange that last night I seemed, for the moment, to forget everything! Ha, ha! Ridiculous, wasn't it? I suppose— But there is no accounting for these queer things. Perhaps I was disappointed to find nothing in the packet. Do you think, Mr. Arbuthnot, that I——" Here he began to tremble. "Do you think that I dreamed it all? Old men think strange things. Perhaps——"

"Let us try to remember the letter, Mr. Emblem."

"Yes, yes—certainly—the letter. Why it went—ahem!—as follows——"

Arnold laid down the pen in despair. The poor old man was mad. He had poured out the wildest farrago without sense, coherence, or story.

"So much for the letter, Mr. Arbuthnot." He was mad without doubt, yet he knew Arnold, and knew, too, why he was in the house. "Ah, I knew it would come back to me. Strange if it did not. Why I read

that letter once every quarter or so for eighteen years. It is a part of myself. I could not forget it."

"And the name of your son-in-law's old friend?"

"Oh yes, the name!"

He gave some name, which might have been the lost name, but as Mr. Emblem changed it the next moment, and forgot it again the moment after, it was doubtful; certainly not much to build upon.

"And the coat-of-arms?"

"We are getting on famously, are we not? The coat, sir, was as follows."

He proceeded to describe an impossible coat—a coat which might have been drawn by a man absolutely ignorant of science.

All this took a couple of hours. It was now eight o'clock.

"Thank you, Mr. Emblem," said Arnold. "I have no doubt now that we shall somehow bring Iris to her own again, in spite of your loss. Shall we go upstairs and have some breakfast?"

"It is all right, Iris," cried the old man gleefully. "It is all right. I have remembered everything, and Mr. Arbuthnot will go out presently and secure your inheritance."

Iris looked at Arnold.

"Yes, dear," she said. "You shall have your breakfast. And then you shall tell me all about it when Arnold goes; and you will take a holiday, won't you—because I am twenty-one to-day?"

"Aha!" He was quite cheerful and mirthful, because he had recovered his memory. "Aha, my dear, all is well! You are twenty-one, and I am seventy-five; and Mr. Arbuthnot will go and bring home the—the inheritance. And I shall sit here all day long. It was a good dream that came to me this morning, was it not? Quite a voice from Heaven, which said: 'Get up and write down the letter while you remember it.' I got up; I found by the—by the merest accident, Mr. Arbuthnot on the stairs, and we have arranged everything for you—everything."

CHAPTER IX. DR. WASHINGTON.

ARNOLD returned to his studio, sat down, and fell fast asleep.

He was awakened about noon by his cousin Clara.

"Oh, Arnold," she cried, shaking him wrathfully by the arm, "this is a moment of the greatest excitement and importance to me, and you are my only adviser, and you are asleep!"

He sprang to his feet.

"I am awake now, Clara. Anxiety and trouble? On account of our talk yesterday?"

He saw that she had been crying. In her hands she had a packet of letters.

"Oh no, no; it is far more important than that. As for our talk——"

"I am engaged to her, Clara."

"So I expected," she replied coldly. "But I am not come here about your engagement. And you do not want my congratulations, I suppose?"

"I should like to have your good wishes, Clara."

"Oh, Arnold, that is what my poor Claude said when he deserted me and married the governess. You men want to have your own way, and then expect us to be delighted with it."

"I expect nothing, Clara. Pray understand that."

"I told Claude, when he wrote asking forgiveness, that he had my good wishes, whatever he chose to do, but that I would not on any account receive his wife. Very well, Arnold; that is exactly what I say to you."

"Very well, Clara. I quite understand. As for the studio, and all the things that you have given me, they are, of course, yours again. Let me restore what I can to you."

"No, Arnold, they are yours. Let me hear no more about things that are your own. Of course, your business, as you call it, is exciting. But as for this other thing, it is far more important. Something has happened; something I always expected; something that I looked forward to for years; although it has waited on the way so long, it has actually come at last, when I had almost forgotten to look for it. So true it is, Arnold, that good fortune and misfortune alike come when we least expect them."

Arnold sat down. He knew his cousin too well to interrupt her. She had her own way of telling a story, and it was a roundabout way.

"I cannot complain, after twenty years, can I? I have had plenty of rope, as you would say. But still it has come at last. And naturally, when it does come, it is a shock."

"Is it hereditary gout, Clara?"

"Gout! Nonsense, Arnold! When the will was read, I said to myself, 'Claude is certain to come back and claim his own. It is his right, and I hope he will come.

But for my own part, I have not the least intention of calling upon the governess.' Then three or four years passed away, and I heard—I do not remember how—that he was dead. And then I waited for his heirs, his children, or their guardians. But they did not come."

"And now they have really come? Oh, Clara, this is indeed a misfortune."

"No, Arnold; call it a restitution, not a misfortune. I have been living all these years on the money which belongs to Claude's heir."

"There was a son, then. And now he has dropped upon us from the clouds?"

"It is a daughter, not a son. But you shall hear. I received a letter this morning from a person called Dr. Joseph Washington, stating that he wrote to me on account of the only child and heiress of the late Claude Deseret."

"Who is Dr. Joseph Washington?"

"He is a physician, he says, and an American."

"Yes; will you go on?"

"I do not mind it, Arnold; I really do not. I must give up my house and put down my carriage, but it is for Claude's daughter. I rejoice to think that he has left someone behind him. Arnold, that face upon your canvas really has got eyes wonderfully like his, if it was not a mere fancy, when I saw it yesterday. I am glad, I say, to give up everything to the child of Claude."

"You think so kindly of him, Clara, who inflicted so much pain on you."

"I can never think bitterly of Claude. We were brought up together; we were like brother and sister; he never loved me in any other way. Oh, I understood it all years ago. To begin with, I was never beautiful; and it was his father's mistake. Well: this American followed up his letter by a visit. In the letter he merely said he had come to London with the heiress. But he called an hour ago, and brought me—oh, Arnold, he brought me one more letter from Claude. It has been waiting for me for eighteen years. After all that time, after eighteen years, my poor dead Claude speaks to me again. My dear, when I thought he was miserable on account of his marriage, I was wrong. His wife made him happy, and he died because she died." The tears came into her eyes again. "Poor boy! Poor Claude! The letter speaks of his child. It says——" She opened and read the letter. "He says: 'Some day my child will, I hope,

come to you, and say: "Cousin Clara, I am Iris Deseret." "

"Iris?" said Arnold.

"It is her name, Arnold. It was the child's grandmother's name."

"A strange coincidence," he said. "Pray go on."

"She will say: 'Cousin Clara, I am Iris Deseret.' Then you will be kind to her, as you would to me, if I were to come home again.' I cannot read any more, my dear, even to you."

"Did this American give you any other proof of what he asserts?"

"He gave me a portrait of Claude, taken years ago, when he was a boy of sixteen, and showed me the certificate of marriage, and the child's certificate of baptism, and letters from his wife. I suppose nothing more can be wanted."

"I dare say it is all right, Clara. But why was not the child brought over before?"

"Because—this is the really romantic part of the story—when her father died, leaving the child, she was adopted by these charitable Americans, and no one ever thought of examining the papers, which were lying in a desk, until the other day."

"You have not seen the young lady."

"No; he is to bring her to-morrow."

"And what sort of a man is this American? Is he a gentleman?"

"Well, I do not quite know. Perhaps Americans are different from Englishmen. If he was an Englishman, I should say without any hesitation that he is not a gentleman, as we count good breeding and good manners. He is a big man, handsome and burly, and he seems good-tempered. When I told him what was the full amount of Iris's inheritance—"

"Iris's inheritance!" Arnold repeated. "I beg your pardon, Clara; pray go on; but it seems like a dream."

"He only laughed, and said he was glad she would have so much. The utmost they hoped, he said, was that it might be a farm, or a house or two, or a few hundreds in the stocks. He is to bring her to-morrow, and of course I shall make her stay with me. As for himself, he says that he is only anxious to get back home to his wife and his practice."

"He wants nothing for himself, then? That seems a good sign."

"I asked him that question, and he said that he could not possibly take money for what he and his family had done for Iris; that is to say, her education and mainte-

nance. This was very generous of him. Perhaps he is really a gentleman by birth, but has provincial manners. He said, however, that he had no objection to receiving the small amount of money spent on the voyage and on Iris's outfit, because they were not rich people, and it was a serious thing to fit out a young lady suitably. So of course I gave him what he suggested, a cheque for two hundred pounds. No one, he added with true feeling, would grudge a single dollar that had been spent upon the education of the dear girl; and this went to my heart."

"She is well educated, then?"

"She sings well," he says, "and has had a good plain education. He said I might rest assured that she was ladylike, because she had been brought up among his own friends."

"That is a very safe guarantee," said Arnold, laughing. "I wonder if she is pretty?"

"I asked him that question too, and he replied very oddly that she had a most splendid figure, which fetched everybody. Is not that rather a vulgar expression?"

"It is, in England. Perhaps in America it belongs to the first circles, and is a survival of the Pilgrim Fathers. So you gave him a cheque for two hundred pounds?"

"Yes; surely I was not wrong, Arnold. Consider the circumstances, the outfit and the voyage, and the man's reluctance and delicacy of feeling."

"I dare say you were quite right, but—well, I think I should have seen the young lady first. Remember, you have given the money to a stranger, on his bare word."

"Oh, Arnold, this man is perfectly honest. I would answer for his truth and honesty. He has frank, honest eyes. Besides, he brought me all those letters. Well, dear, you are not going to desert me because you are engaged, are you, Arnold? I want you to be present when she comes to-morrow morning."

"Certainly I will be present, with the greatest—no, not the greatest pleasure. But I will be present—I will come to luncheon, Clara."

When she was gone he thought again of the strange coincidence, both of the man and of the inheritance. Yet what had his Iris in common with a girl who had been brought up in America? Besides, she had lost her inheritance, and this other Iris had crossed the ocean to receive hers. Yet a very strange coincidence. It was so strange that he told it to Iris and to Lala

Roy. Iris laughed, and said she did not know she had a single namesake. Lala did not laugh; but he sat thinking in silence. There was no chess for him that night; instead of playing his usual game, Mr. Emblem, in his chair, laughed and chuckled in rather a ghastly way.

CHAPTER X. "IT IS MY COUSIN."

"WELL, Joe," said his wife, "and how is it going to finish? It looks to me as if there was a prison-van and a police-court at the end. Don't you think we had better back out of it while there is time?"

"You're a fool!" her husband replied—it was the morning after his visit to Clara; "you know nothing about it. Now listen."

"I do nothing but listen; you've told me the story till I know it by heart. Do you think anybody in the world will be so green as to believe such a clumsy plant as that?"

"Now look here, Lotty; if there's another word said—mind, now—you shall have nothing more to do with the business at all. I'll give it to a girl I know—a clever girl, who will carry it through with flying colours."

She set her lips hard, and drummed her fingers on the table. He knew how to rule his wife.

"Go on," she said, "since we can't be honest."

"Be reasonable, then; that's all I ask you. Honest! who is honest? Ain't we every one engaged in getting round our neighbours? Isn't the whole game, all the world over, lying and deceit? Honest! you might as well go on the boards without faking up your face, as try to live honest. Hold your tongue, then." He growled and swore, and after his fashion called on the Heavens to witness and express their astonishment.

The girl bent her head, and made no reply for a space. She was cowed and afraid. Presently she looked up and laughed, but with a forced laugh.

"Don't be cross, Joe; I'll do whatever you want me to do, and cheerfully, too, if it will do you any good. What is a woman good for but to help her husband? Only don't be cross, Joe."

She knew what her husband was by this time—a false and unscrupulous man. Yet she loved him. The case is not rare by any means, so that there is hope for all of us, from the meanest and most wriggling worm among us to the most hectoring ruffian.

"Why there, Lotty," he said, "that is what I like. Now listen. The old lady is a cake—do you understand? She is a sponge, she swallows everything, and is ready to fall on your neck and cry over you for joy. As for doubt or suspicion, not a word. I don't think there will be a single question asked. No, it's all 'My poor dear Claude'—that's your father, Lotty—and 'My poor dear Iris'—that's you, Lotty."

"All right, Joe, go on. I am Iris—I am anybody you like. Go on."

"The more I think about it, the more I'm certain we shall do the trick. Only keep cool over the job, and forget the Music Hall. You are Iris Deseret, and you are the daughter of Claude Deseret, deceased. I am Dr. Washington, one of the American family who brought you up. You're grateful, mind. Nothing can be more lively than your gratitude. We've been brother and sister, you and me, and I've got a wife and young family and a rising practice at home in the State of Maine, and I am only come over here to see you into your rights at great personal expense. Paid a substitute. Yes, actually paid a substitute. We only found the papers the other day, which is the reason why we did not come over before, and I am going home again directly."

"You are not really going away, Joe, are you?"

"No, I am going to stay here; but I shall pretend to go away. Now remember, we've got no suspicion ourselves, and we don't expect to meet any. If there is any, we are surprised and sorry. We don't come to the lady with a lawyer or a blunderbuss; we come as friends, and we shall arrange this little business between ourselves. Oh, never you fear, we shall arrange it quite comfortably, without lawyers."

"How much do you think we shall get out of it, Joe?"

"Listen, and open your eyes. There's nearly a hundred and twenty thousand pounds and a small estate in the country. Don't let us trouble about the estate more than we can help. Estates mean lawyers. Money doesn't."

He spoke as if small sums like a hundred thousand pounds are carried about in the pocket.

"Good gracious! And you've got two hundred of it already, haven't you?"

"Yes, but what is two hundred out of a hundred and twenty thousand? A hundred

and twenty thousand ! There's spending in it, isn't there, Lotty ? Gad, we'll make the money spin, I calculate ! It may be a few weeks before the old lady transfers the money—I don't quite know where it is, but in stocks or something—to your name. As soon as it is in your name I've got a plan. We'll remember that you've got a sweetheart or something in America, and you'll break your heart for wanting to see him. And then nothing will do but you must run across for a trip. Oh, I'll manage, and we'll make the money fly."

He was always adding new details to his story, finding something to embellish it and heighten the effect, and now having succeeded in getting the false Iris into the house, he began already to devise schemes to get her out again.

"A hundred thousand pounds ! Why, Joe, it is a terrible great sum of money. Good gracious ! What shall we do with it, when we get it ?"

"I'll show you what to do with it, my girl."

"And you said, Joe—you declared that it is your own by rights."

"Certainly, it is my own. It would have been bequeathed to me by my own cousin. But she didn't know it. And she died without knowing it, and I am her heir."

Lotty wondered vaguely and rather sadly how much of this statement was true. But she did not dare to ask. She had promised her assistance. Every night she woke with a dreadful dream of a policeman knocking at the door ; whenever she saw a man in blue she trembled ; and she knew perfectly well that, if the plot failed, it was she herself, in all probability, and not her husband at all, who would be put in the dock. She did not believe a word about the cousin ; she knew she was going to do a vile and dreadful wickedness, but she was ready to go through with it, or with anything else, to pleasure a husband who already, the honeymoon hardly finished, showed the propensities of a rover.

"Very well, Lotty ; we are going there at once. You need take nothing with you, but you won't come back here for a good spell. In fact, I think I shall have to give up these lodgings, for fear of accidents. I shall leave you with your cousin."

"Yes ; and I'm to be quiet, and behave pretty, I suppose ?"

"You'll be just as quiet and demure as you used to be when you were serving in the music-shop. No loud laughing, no capers, no comic songs, and no dancing."

"And am I to begin at once by asking for the money to be—what do you call it, transferred ?"

"No ; you are not on any account to say a word about the money ; you are to go on living there without hinting at the money—without showing any desire to discuss the subject—perhaps for months, until there can't be the shadow of a doubt that you are the old woman's cousin. You are to make much of her, flatter her, cocker her up, find out all the family secrets, and get the length of her foot ; but you are not to say one single word about the money. As for your manners, I'm not afraid of them, because when you like, you can look and talk like a countess."

"I know now." She got up and changed her face so that it became at once subdued and quiet, like a quiet serving-girl behind a counter. "So, is that modest enough, Joe ? And as for singing, I shall sing for her, but not music-hall trash. This kind of thing. Listen."

There was a piano in the room, and she sat down and sang to her own accompaniment, with a sweet, low voice, one of the soft, sad German songs.

"That'll do," cried Joe. "Hang me ! what a clever girl you are, Lotty ! That's the kind of thing the swells like. As for me, give me ten minutes of Jolly Nash. But you know how to pull 'em in, Lotty."

It was approaching twelve, the hour when they were due. Lotty retired and arrayed herself in her quietest and most sober dress, a costume in some brown stuff, with a bonnet to match. She put on her best gloves and boots, having herself felt the inferiority of the shop-girl to the lady in those minor points ; and she modified and mitigated her fringe, which, she knew, was rather more exaggerated than young ladies in Society generally wear.

"You're not afraid, Lotty ?" said Joe, when at last she was ready to start.

"Afraid ? Not I, Joe. Come along. I couldn't look quieter, not if I was to make up as I do in the evening as a Quakeress. Come along. Oh, Joe, it will be awful dull ! Don't forget to send word to the Hall that I am ill. Afraid ? Not I !" She laughed, but rather hysterically.

There would be, however, she secretly considered, some excitement when it came to the finding out, which would happen, she was convinced, in a very few hours. In fact, she had no faith at all in the story being accepted and believed by anybody ; to be

sure, she herself had been trained, as ladies in shops generally are, to mistrust all mankind, and she could not understand at all the kind of confidence which comes of having the very thing presented to you which you ardently desire. When they arrived in Chester Square, she found waiting for her a lady, who was certainly not beautiful, but she had kind eyes, which looked eagerly at the strange face, and with an expression of disappointment.

"It can't be the fringe," thought Lotty.

"Cousin Clara," she said softly and sweetly, as her husband had taught her, "I am Iris Deseret, the daughter of your old playfellow, Claude."

"Oh, my dear, my dear," cried Clara with enthusiasm, "come to my arms! Welcome home again!"

She kissed and embraced her. Then she held her by both hands, and looked at her face again.

"My dear," she said, "you have been a long time coming. I had almost given up hoping that Claude had any children. But you are welcome, after all—very welcome. You are in your own house, remember, my dear. This house is yours, and the plate, and furniture, and everything, and I am only your tenant."

"Oh!" said Lotty, overwhelmed. Why, she had actually been taken on her word, or rather the word of Joe.

"Let me kiss you again. Your face does not remind me as yet, in any single feature, of your father's. But I dare say I shall find resemblance presently. And, indeed, your voice does remind me of him already. He had a singularly sweet and delicate voice."

"Iris has a remarkably sweet and delicate voice," said Joe softly. "No doubt she got it from her father. You will hear her sing presently."

Lotty hardly knew her husband. His face was preternaturally solemn, and he looked as if he was engaged in the most serious business of his life.

"All her father's ways were gentle and delicate," said Clara.

"Just like hers," said Joe. When all of us—American boys and girls, pretty rough at times—were playing and larking about, Iris would be just sittin' out like a cat on a carpet, quiet and demure. I suppose she got that way, too, from her father."

"No doubt; and as for your face, my dear, I dare say I shall find a likeness presently. But just now I see none. Will you take off your bonnet?"

When the girl's bonnet was off, Clara looked at her again, curiously, but kindly.

"I suppose I can't help looking for a likeness, my dear. But you must take after your mother, whom I never saw. Your father's eyes were full and limpid; yours are large, and clear, and bright; very good eyes, my dear, but they are not limpid. His mouth was flexible and mobile, but yours is firm. Your hair, however, reminds me somewhat of his, which was much your light shade of brown when he was young. And now, sir"—she addressed Joe—"now that you have brought this dear girl all the way across the Atlantic, what are you going to do?"

"Well, I don't exactly know that there's anything to keep me," said Joe. "You see, I've got my practice to look after at home—I am a physician, as I told you—and my wife and children; and the sooner I get back the better, now that I can leave Iris with her friends, safe and comfortable. Stay," he added, "there are all those papers which I promised you—the certificates, and the rest of them. You had better take them all, miss, and keep them for Iris."

"Thank you," said Clara, touched by this confidence; "Iris will be safe with me. It is very natural that you should want to go home again. And you will be content to stay with me, my dear, won't you? You need not be afraid, sir; I assure you that her interests will not in any way suffer. Tell her to write and let you know exactly what is done. Let her, however, since she is an English girl, remain with English friends, and get to know her cousins and relations. You can safely trust her with me, Dr. Washington."

"Thank you," said Joe. "You know that when one has known a girl all her life, one is naturally anxious about her happiness. We are almost brother and sister."

"I know; and I am sure, Mr. Washington, we ought to be most grateful to you. As for the money you have expended upon her, let me once more beg of you——"

Joe waved his hand majestically.

"As for that," he said, "the money is spent. Iris is welcome to it, if it were ten times as much. Now, madam, you trusted me, the very first day that you saw me, with two hundred pounds sterling. Only an English lady would have done that. You trusted me without asking me who or what I was, or doubting my word. I assure you, madam, I felt that kindness, and that trust, very much indeed; and in return, I have brought you Iris herself.

After all expenses paid of coming over and getting back, buying a few things for Iris, if I find that there's anything over, I shall ask you to take back the balance. Madam, I thank you for the money, but I am sure I have repaid you—with Iris."

This was a very clever speech. If there had been a shadow of doubt before it in Clara's heart (which there was not), it would vanish now. She cordially and joyfully accepted her newly-found cousin.

"And now, Iris," he said with a manly tremor in his voice, "I do not know if I shall see you again before I go away. If not, I shall take your fond love to all of them at home—Tom, and Dick, and Harry, and Harriet, and Prissy, and all of them"—Joe really was carrying the thing through splendidly—"and perhaps, my dear, when you are a grand lady in England, you will give a thought—a thought now and again—to your old friends across the water."

"Oh, Joe!" cried Lotty, really carried away with admiration, and ashamed of her sceptical spirit. "Oh," she whispered, "ain't you splendid!"

"But you must not go, Dr. Washington," said Clara, "without coming again to say farewell. Will you not dine with us to-night? Will you stay and have lunch?"

"No, madam, I thank you. It will be best for me to leave Iris alone with you. The sooner she learns your English ways and forgets American ways, the better."

"But you are not going to start away for Liverpool at once? You will stay a day or two in London——"

The American Physician said that perhaps he might stay a week longer for scientific purposes.

"Have you got enough money, Joe?" asked the new Iris thoughtfully.

Joe gave her a glance of infinite admiration.

"Well," he said, "the fact is that I should like to buy a few books and things. Perhaps——"

"Cousin," said Lotty eagerly, "please give him a cheque for a hundred pounds. Make it a hundred. You said everything was mine. No, Joe, I won't hear a word about repayment, as if a little thing like fifty pounds, or a hundred pounds, should want to be repaid! As if you and I could ever talk about repayment!"

Clara did as she was asked readily and eagerly. Then Joe departed, promising to call and say farewell before he left England, and resolving that in his next visit—his last visit—there should be

another cheque. But he had made one mistake: he had parted with the papers. No one in any situation of life should ever give up the power until he has secured the substance. But it is human to err.

"And now, my dear," said Clara warmly, "sit down and let us talk. Arnold is coming to lunch with us, and to make your acquaintance."

When Arnold came a few minutes later, he was astonished to find his cousin already on the most affectionate terms with the newly-arrived Iris Deseret. She was walking about the room showing her the pictures of her grandfather and other ancestors, and they were hand-in-hand.

"Arnold," said Clara, "this is Iris, and I hope you will both be great friends; Iris, this is my cousin, but he is not yours."

"I don't pretend to know how that may be," said the young lady. "But then I am glad to know all your cousins, whether they are mine or not; only don't bother me with questions, because I don't remember anything, and I don't know anything. Why, until the other day I did not even know that I was an English lady, not until they found those papers."

A strange accent for an American! and she certainly said "laidy" for "lady," and "paiper" for "paper," like a cockney. Alas! This comes of London Music Halls even to country-bred damsels!

Arnold made a mental observation that the new comer might be called anything in the world, but could not be called a lady. She was handsome, certainly, but how could Claude Deseret's daughter have grown into so common a type of beauty? Where was the delicacy of feature and manner which Clara had never ceased to commend in speaking of her lost cousin?

"Iris," said Clara, "is our little savage from the American Forest. She is Queen Pocahontas, who has come over to conquer England and to win all our hearts. My dear, my cousin Arnold will help me to make you an English girl."

She spoke as if the State of Maine was still the hunting-ground of Sioux and Iroquois.

Arnold thought that a less American-looking girl he had never seen; that she did not speak or look like a lady was to be expected perhaps, if she had, as was probable, been brought up by rough and unpolished people. But he had no doubt, any more than Clara herself, as to the identity of the girl. Nobody ever doubts a claimant. Every impostor, from

Demetrius downwards, has gained his supporters and partisans by simply living among them and keeping up the imposition. It is so easy, in fact, to be a claimant, that it is wonderful there are not more of them.

Then luncheon was served, and the young lady not only showed a noble appetite, but, to Arnold's astonishment, confessed to an ardent love for bottled stout.

"Most American ladies," he said impertinently, "only drink water, do they not?"

Lotty perceived that she had made a mistake.

"I only drink stout," she said, "when the doctor tells me. But I like it all the same."

She certainly had no American accent. But she would not talk much; she was perhaps shy. After luncheon, however, Clara asked her if she would sing, and she complied, showing considerable skill with her accompaniment, and singing a simple song in good taste and with a sweet voice. Arnold observed, however, that there was some weakness about the letter "h," less common among Americans than among the English. Presently he went away, and the girl, who had been aware that he was watching her, breathed more easily.

"Who is your cousin Arnold?" she asked.

"My dear, he is my cousin but not yours. You will not see him often, because he is going to be married, I am sorry to say, and to be married beneath him—oh, it is dreadful!—to some tradesman's girl, my dear."

"Dreadful!" said Iris with a queer look in her eyes. "Well, cousin, I don't want to see much of him. He's a good-looking chap, too, though rather too finicking for my taste. I like a man who looks as if he could knock another man down. Besides, he looks at me as if I was a riddle, and he wanted to find out the answer."

In the evening Arnold found that no change had come over the old man. He was, however, perfectly happy, so that, considering the ruin of his worldly prospects, it was, perhaps, as well that he had parted, for a time, at least, with his wits. Some worldly misfortunes there are which should always produce this effect.

"You told me," said Lala Roy, "that another Iris had just come from America to claim an inheritance of your cousin."

"Yes; it is a very strange coincidence."

"Very strange. Two Englishmen die in America at the same time, each having

a daughter named Iris, and each daughter entitled to some kind of inheritance."

Lala Roy spoke slowly, and with meaning.

"Oh!" cried Arnold. "It is more than strange. Do you think—is it possible——"

He could not for the moment clothe his thoughts in words.

"Do you know if anyone has brought this girl to England?"

"Yes; she was brought over by a young American Physician, one of the family who adopted and brought her up."

"What is he like—the young American Physician?"

"I have not seen him."

"Go, my young friend, to-morrow morning, and ask your cousin if this photograph resembles the American Physician."

It was the photograph of a handsome young fellow, with strongly-marked features, apparently tall and well-set-up.

"Lala, you don't really suspect anything—you don't think——"

"Hush! I know who has stolen the papers. Perhaps the same man has produced the heiress."

"And you think—you suspect that the man who stole the papers is connected with—— But then those papers must be—oh, it cannot be! For then Iris would be Clara's cousin—Clara's cousin—and the other an impostor."

"Even so; everything is possible. But silence. Do not speak a word, even to Iris. If the papers are lost, they are lost. Say nothing to her yet; but go—go, and find out if that photograph resembles the American Physician. The river wanders here and there, but the sea swallows it at last."

CHAPTER XL MR. JAMES MAKES ATONEMENT.

JAMES arrived as usual in the morning at nine o'clock, in order to take down the shutters. To his astonishment, he found Lala Roy and Iris waiting for him in the back shop. And they had grave faces.

"James," said Iris, "your master has suffered a great shock, and is not himself this morning. His safe has been broken open by someone, and most important papers have been taken out."

"Papers, miss—papers? Out of the safe?"

"Yes. They are papers of no value whatever to the thief, whoever he may be. But they are of the very greatest importance to us. Your master seems to have lost his memory for a while, and cannot

help us in finding out who has done this wicked thing. You have been a faithful servant for so long that I am sure you will do what you can for us. Think for us. Try to remember if anybody besides yourself has had access to this room when your master was out of it."

James sat down. He felt that he must sit down, though Lala Roy was looking at him with eyes full of doubt and suspicion. The whole enormity of his own guilt, though he had not stolen anything, fell upon him. He had got the key; he had given it to Mr. Joseph; and he had received it back again. In fact, at that very moment, it was lying in his pocket. The worst that he had feared had happened. The safe was robbed.

He was struck with so horrible a dread, and so fearful a looking forward to judgment and condemnation, that his teeth chattered and his eye gave way,

"You will think it over, James," said Iris; "think it over, and tell us presently if you can remember anything."

"Think it over, Mr. James," Lala Roy repeated in his deepest tone, and with an emphatic gesture of his right forefinger. "Think it over carefully. Like a lamp that is never extinguished are the eyes of the faithful servant."

They left him, and James fell back into his chair with hollow cheek and beating heart.

"He told me," he murmured—"oh, the villain!—he swore to me that he had taken nothing from the safe. He said he only looked in it, and read the contents. The scoundrel! He has stolen the papers! He must have known they were there. And then, to save himself, he put me on to the job. For who would be suspected if not—oh, Lord!—if not me?"

He grasped his paste-brush, and attacked his work with a feverish anxiety to find relief in exertion; but his heart was not in it, and presently a thought pierced his brain, as an arrow pierceth the heart, and under the pang and agony of it, his face turned ashy pale, and the big drops stood upon his brow.

"For," he thought, "suppose that the thing gets abroad; suppose they were to advertise a reward; suppose the man who made the key were to see the advertisement or to hear about it! And he knows my name, too, and my business; and he'll let out for a reward—I know he will—who it was ordered that key of him."

Already he saw himself examined before

a magistrate; already he saw in imagination that locksmith's man who made the key kissing the Testament, and giving his testimony in clear and distinct words, which could not be shaken.

"Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" he groaned. "No one will believe me, even if I do confess the truth; and as for him, I know him well; if I go to him, he'll only laugh at me. But I must go to him—I must!"

He was so goaded by his terror that he left the shop unprotected—a thing he had never thought to do—and ran as fast as he could to Joe's lodgings. But he had left them; he was no longer there; he had not been there for six weeks; the landlady did not know his address, or would not give it. Then James felt sick and dizzy, and would have sat down on the doorstep and cried but for the look of the thing. Besides, he remembered the unprotected shop. So he turned away sadly and walked back, well understanding now that he had fallen like a fool into a trap, artfully set to fasten suspicion and guilt upon himself.

When he returned he found the place full of people. Mr. Emblem was sitting in his customary place, and he was smiling. He did not look in the least like a man who had been robbed. He was smiling pleasantly and cheerfully. Mr. Chalker was also present, a man with whom no one ever smiled, and Lala Roy, solemn and dignified, and a man—an unknown man—who sat in the outer shop, and seemed to take no interest at all in the proceedings. Were they come, he asked himself, to arrest him on the spot?

Apparently they were not, for no one took the least notice of him, and they were occupied with something else. How could they think of anything else? Yet Mr. Chalker, standing at the table, was making a speech, which had nothing to do with the robbery.

"Here I am, you see, Mr. Emblem," he said; "I have told you already that I don't want to do anything to worry you. Let us be friends all round. This gentleman, your friend from India, will advise you, I am sure, for your own good, not to be obstinate. Lord! what is the amount, after all, to a substantial man like yourself? A substantial man, I say." He spoke confidently, but he glanced about the shop with doubtful eyes. "Granted that it was borrowed to get your grandson out of a scrape—supposing he promised to pay it back and hasn't done so; putting the case that it has grown and developed itself as

bills will do, and can't help doing, and can't be stopped; it isn't the fault of the lawyers, but the very nature of a bill to go on growing—it's like a baby for growing. Why, after all, you were your grandson's security—you can't escape that. And when I would no longer renew, you gave of your own accord—come now, you can't deny that—a Bill of Sale on goods and furniture. Now, Mr. Emblem, didn't you? Don't let us have any bitterness or quarrelling. Let's be friends, and tell me I may send away the man."

Mr. Emblem smiled pleasantly, but did not reply.

"A Bill of Sale it was, dated January the 25th, 1883, just before that cursed Act of Parliament granted the five days' notice. Here is the bailiff's man in possession. You can pay the amount, which is, with costs and Sheriff's Poundage, three hundred and fifty-one pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence, at once, or you may pay it five days hence. Otherwise the shop, and furniture, and all, will be sold off in seven days."

"Oh," James gasped, listening with bewilderment, "we can't be going to be sold up! Emblem's to be sold up!"

"Three hundred and fifty pounds!" said Mr. Emblem. "My friend, let us rather speak of thousands. This is a truly happy day for all of us. Sit down, Mr. Chalker—my dear friend, sit down. Rejoice with us. A happy morning."

"What the devil is the matter with him?" asked the money-lender.

"There was something, Mr. Chalker," Mr. Emblem went on cheerfully, "something said about my grandson. Joe was always a bad lot; lucky his father and mother are out of the way in Australia. You came to me about that business, perhaps? Oh, on such a joyful day as this I forgive everybody. Tell Joe I do not want to see him, but I have forgiven him."

"Oh, he's mad!" growled James; "he's gone stark staring mad!"

"You don't seem quite yourself this morning, Mr. Emblem," said Mr. Chalker. "Perhaps this gentleman, your friend from India, will advise you when I am gone. You don't understand, Mister," he addressed Lala Roy, "the nature of a bill. Once you start a bill, and begin to renew it, it's like planting a tree, for it grows and grows of its own accord, and by Act of Parliament, too, though they do try to hack and cut it down in the most cruel way. You see Mr. Emblem is obstinate.

He's got to pay off that bill, which is a Bill of Sale, and he won't do it. Make him write the cheque and have done with it."

"This is the best day's work I ever did," Mr. Emblem went on. "To remember the letter, word for word, and everything! Mr. Arbutnot has, very likely, finished the whole business by now. Thousands—thousands—and all for Iris!"

"Look here, Mr. Emblem," said the lawyer angrily. "You'll not only be a bankrupt if you go on like this, but you'll be a fraudulent bankrupt as well. Is it honest, I want to know, to refuse to pay your just debts when you've put by thousands, as you boast—you actually boast—for your granddaughter?"

"Yes," said the old man, "Iris will have thousands."

"I think, sir," said Lala Roy, "that you are under an illusion. Mr. Emblem does not possess any such savings or investments as you imagine."

"Then why does he go on talking about thousands?"

"He has had a shock; he cannot quite understand what has happened. You had better leave him for the present."

"Leave him! And nothing but these mouldy old books! Here, you sir—you—James—you shopman—come here! What is the stock worth?"

"It depends upon whether you are buying or selling," said James. "If you were to sell it under the hammer, in lots, it wouldn't fetch a hundred pounds."

"There, you hear—you hear, all of you! Not a hundred pounds, and my Bill of Sale is three-fifty."

"Pray, sir," said Lala Roy, "who told you that Mr. Emblem was so wealthy?"

"His grandson."

"Then, sir, perhaps it would be well to question the grandson further. He may know things of which we have heard nothing."

The Act of 1882, which came into operation in the following January, is cruel indeed, I am told, to those who advanced money on Bills of Sale before that date, for it allows—it actually allows the debtor five clear days during which he may, if he can, without being caught, make away with portions of his furniture and belongings—the smaller and the more precious portion; or he may find someone else to lend him the money, and so get off clear and save his sticks. It is, as the modern Shylock declares, a most wicked and iniquitous Act, by which the shark may be balked, and many an honest

tradesman, who would otherwise have been most justly ruined, is enabled to save his stock, and left to worry along until the times become more prosperous. To a man like Mr. David Chalker, such an Act of Parliament is most revolting.

He went away at length, leaving the man—the professional person—behind. Then Lala Roy persuaded Mr. Emblem to go upstairs again. He did so without any apparent consciousness that there was a Man in Possession.

"James," said Lala Roy, "you have heard that your master has been robbed. You are reflecting and meditating on this circumstance. Another thing is that a creditor has threatened to sell off everything for a debt. Most likely, everything will be sold, and the shop closed. You will, therefore, lose the place you have had for five-and-twenty years. That is a very bad business for you. You are unfortunate this morning. To lose your place—and then this robbery. That seems also a bad business."

"It is," said James with a hollow groan. "It is, Mr. Lala Roy. It is a dreadful bad business."

"Pray, Mr. James," continued this man with grave, searching eyes which made sinners shake in their shoes, "pray, why did you run away, and where did you go after you opened the shop this morning? You went to see Mr. Emblem's grandson, did you not?"

"Yes, I did," said James.

"Why did you go to see him?"

"I w—w—went—oh, Lord!—I went to tell him what had happened, because he is master's grandson, and I thought he ought to know," said James.

"Did you tell him?"

"No; he has left his lodgings. I don't know where he is—oh, and he always told me the shop was his—settled on him," he said.

"He is the Father of Lies; his end will be confusion. Shame and confusion shall wait upon all who have hearkened unto him or worked with him, until they repent and make atonement."

"Don't, Mister Lala Roy—don't; you frighten me," said James. "Oh, what a dreadful Liar he is!"

All that morning the Philosopher sat in the bookseller's chair, and James, in the outer shop, felt that those deep eyes were resting continually upon him, and knew that bit by bit his secret would be dragged from him. If he could get up and run

away—if a customer would come—if the dark gentleman would go upstairs—if he could think of something else! But none of these things happened, and James, at his table with the paste before him, passed a morning compared with which any seat anywhere in Purgatory would have been comfortable. Presently a strange feeling came over him, as if some invisible force was pushing and dragging him and forcing him to leave his chair, and throw himself at the Philosopher's feet and confess everything. This was the mesmeric effect of those reproachful eyes fixed steadily upon him. And in the doorway, like some figure in a nightmare—a figure incongruous and out of place—the Man in Possession sitting, passive and unconcerned, with one eye on the street and the other on the shop. Upstairs Mr. Emblem was sitting fast asleep; joy had made him sleepy; and Iris was at work among her pupils' letters, compiling sums for the Fruiterer, making a paper on Conic Sections for the Cambridge man, and working out Trigonometrical Equations for the young schoolmaster, and her mind full of a solemn exultation and glory, for she was a woman who was loved. The other things troubled her but little. Her grandfather would get back his equilibrium of mind; the shop might be shut up, but that mattered little. Arnold, and Lala Roy, and her grandfather, and herself, would all live together, and she and Arnold would work. The selfishness of youth is really astonishing. Nothing—except perhaps toothache—can make a girl unhappy who is loved and newly betrothed. She may say what she pleases, and her face may be a yard long when she speaks of the misfortunes of others, but all the time her heart is dancing.

To Lala Roy, the situation presented a problem with insufficient data, some of which would have to be guessed. A letter, now lost, said that a certain case contained papers necessary to obtain an unknown inheritance for Iris. How then to ascertain whether anybody was expecting or looking for a girl to claim an inheritance? Then there was half a coat-of-arms, and lastly there was a certain customer of unknown name, who had been acquainted with Iris's father before his marriage. So far for Iris. As for the thief, Lala Roy had no doubt at all. It was, he was quite certain, the grandson, whose career he had watched for some years with interest and curiosity. Who else was there who would

steal the papers? And who would help him, and give him access to the safe? He did not only suspect, he was certain that James was in some way cognisant of the deed. Why else did he turn so pale? Why did he rush off to Joe's lodgings? Why did he sit trembling?"

At half-past twelve Lala Roy rose.

"It is your dinner-hour," he said to James, and it seemed to the unhappy man as if he was saying, "I know all." "It is your dinner-hour; go, eat, refresh the body. Whom should suspicion affright except the guilty?"

James put on his hat and sneaked—he felt that he was sneaking—out of the shop.

During his dinner-hour, Joseph himself called. It was an unusual thing to see him at any time; in fact, as he was never wont to call upon his grandfather, unless he was in a scrape and wanted money, no one ever made the poor young man welcome, or begged him to come more often.

But this morning, he walked upstairs and appeared so cheerful, so entirely free from any self-reproach for past sins, and so easy in his mind, without the least touch of the old hangdog look, that Iris began to reproach herself for thinking badly of her cousin.

When he was told about the robbery, he expressed the greatest surprise that any one in the world could be so wicked as to rob an old man like his grandfather. Besides his abhorrence of crime in the abstract, he affirmed that the robbery of a safe was a species of villainy for which hanging was too mild—much too mild a punishment. He then asked his grandfather what were the contents of the packet stolen, and when he received no answer except a pleasant and a cheery laugh, he asked Iris, and learned to his sorrow that the contents were unknown, and could not, therefore, be identified, even if they were found. This, he said, was a thousand pities, because, if they had been known, a reward might have been offered. For his own part he would advise the greatest caution. Nothing at all should be done at first; no step should be taken which might awaken suspicion; they should go on as if the papers were without value. As for that, they had no real proof that there was any robbery. Iris thought of telling him about the water-mark of the blank pages, but refrained. Perhaps there was no robbery after all—who was to prove what had been inside the

packet? But if there had been papers, and if they were valueless except to the rightful owners, they would, perhaps, be sent back voluntarily; or after a time, say a year or two, they might be advertised for; not as if the owners were very anxious to get them, and not revealing the nature of the papers, but cautiously; and presently, if they had not been destroyed, the holders of the papers would answer the advertisement, and then a moderate reward might, after a while, be offered; and so on, giving excellent advice. While he was speaking, Lala Roy entered the room in his noiseless manner, and took his accustomed chair.

"And what do you think, sir?" said Joseph, when he had finished. "You have heard my advice. You are not an Englishman, but I suppose you've got some intelligence."

Lala bowed and spread his hands, but replied not.

"Your opinion should be asked," Joseph went on, "because, you see, as the only other person, besides my grandfather and my cousin, in the house, you might yourself be suspected. Indeed," he added, "I have no doubt you will be suspected. When I take over the conduct of the case, which will be my task, I suppose, it will, perhaps, be my duty to suspect you."

Lala bowed again and again, spread his hands, but did not speak.

In fact, Joseph now perceived that he was having the conversation wholly to himself. His grandfather sat passive, listening as one who, in a dream, hears voices but does not heed what they are saying, yet smiling politely. Iris listened, but paid no heed. She thought that a great deal of fuss was being made about papers, which, perhaps, were worth nothing. And as for her inheritance, why, as she never expected to get any, she was not going to mourn the loss of what, perhaps, was worth nothing.

"Very well, then," said Joseph, "that's all I've got to say. I've given you the best advice I can, and I suppose I may go. Have you lost your voice, Iris?"

"No; but I think you had better go, Joseph. My grandfather is not able to talk this morning, and I dare say your advice is very good, but we have other advisers."

"As for you, Mr. Lala Roy, or whatever you call yourself," said Joe roughly, "I've warned you. Suspicion will certainly fall upon you, and what I say is—take care. For my own part I never did believe in niggers, and I wouldn't have one in my house."

Lala Roy again bowed and spread his fingers.

Then Joseph went away. The door between the shop and the hall was half-open, and he looked in. A strange man was sitting in the outer shop, a pipe in his mouth, and James was leaning his head upon his hands, with wild and haggard eyes gazing straight before him.

"Poor devil!" murmured Joseph. "I feel for him, I do indeed. He had the key made—for himself; he certainly let me use it once, but only once, and who's to prove it? And he's had the opportunity every day of using it himself. That's very awkward, Foxy, my boy. If I were Foxy, I should be in a funk, myself."

He strolled away, thinking that all promised well. Lotty most favourably and unsuspiciously received in her new character; no one knowing the contents of the packet; his grandfather gone silly; and for himself, he had had the opportunity of advising exactly what he wished to be done—namely, that silence and inaction should be observed for a space, in order to give the holders of the property a chance of offering terms. What better advice could he give? And what line of action would be better or safer for himself?

If James had known who was in the house-passage, the other side of the door, there would, I think, have been a collision of two solid bodies. But he did not know, and presently Lala Roy came back, and the torture began again. James took down books and put them up again; he moved about feverishly, doing nothing, with a duster in his hand; but all the time he felt those deep accusing eyes upon him with a silence worse than a thousand questions. He knew—he was perfectly certain—that he should be found out. And all the trouble for nothing! and the Bailiff's man in possession, and the safe robbed, and those eyes upon him, saying, as plain as eyes could speak, "Thou art the Man!"

"And Joe is the man," said James; "not me at all. What I did was wrong, but I was tempted. Oh, what a precious liar and villain he is! And what a fool I've been!"

The day passed more slowly than it seemed possible for any day to pass; always the man in the shop; always the deep eyes of the silent Hindoo upon him. It was a relief when, once, Mr. Chalker looked in and surveyed the shelves with a

suspicious air, and asked if the old man had by this time listened to reason.

It is the business of him who makes plunder out of other men's distresses—as the jackal feeds upon the offal and the putrid carcase—to know as exactly as he can how his fellow-creatures are situated. For this reason such an one doth diligently enquire, listen, pick up secrets, put two and two together, and pry curiously into everybody's affairs, being never so happy as when he gets an opportunity of going to the rescue of a sinking man. Thus among those who lived in good repute about the lower end of the King's Road, none had a better name than Mr. Emblem, and no one was considered to have made more of his chances. And it was with joy that Mr. Chalker received Joe one evening and heard from him the dismal story, that if he could not find fifty pounds within a few hours, he was ruined. The fifty pounds was raised on a bill bearing Mr. Emblem's name. When it was presented, however, and the circumstances explained, the old gentleman, who had at first refused to own the signature, accepted it meekly, and told no one that his grandson had written it himself, and without the polite formality of asking permission to sign for him. In other words, Joseph was a forger, and Mr. Chalker knew it, and this made him the more astonished when Mr. Emblem did not take up the bill, but got it renewed quarter after quarter, substituting at length a bill of sale, as if he was determined to pay as much as possible for his grandson's sins.

"Where is he?" asked the money-lender angrily. "Why doesn't he come down and face his creditors?"

"Master's upstairs," said James, "and you've seen yourself, Mr. Chalker, that he is off his chump. And oh, sir, who would have thought that Emblem's would have come to ruin?"

"But there's something, James—Come, think—there must be something."

"Mr. Joseph said there were thousands. But he's a terrible liar—oh, Mr. Chalker, he's a terrible liar and villain! Why, he's even deceived me!"

"What? Has he borrowed your money?"

"Worse—worse. Do you know where I could find him, sir?"

"Well, I don't know—" Mr. Chalker was not in the habit of giving addresses, but in this case, perhaps Joe might be squeezed as well as his grandfather. Un-

fortunately that bill with the signature had been destroyed. "I don't know. Perhaps if I find out I may tell you. And, James, if you can learn anything—this rubbish won't fetch half the money—I'll make it worth your while, James, I will indeed."

"I'll make him take his share," said James to himself. "If I have to go to prison, he shall go too. They sha'n't send me without sending him."

He looked round. The watchful eyes were gone. The Hindoo had gone away noiselessly. James breathed again.

"After all," he said, "how are they to find out? How are they to prove anything? Mr. Joseph took the things, and I helped him to a key; and he isn't likely to split, and—oh, Lord, if they were to find it!" For at that moment he felt the duplicate key in his waistcoat-pocket. "If they were to find it!"

He took the key out, and looked at the bright and innocent-looking thing, as a murderer might look at his blood-stained dagger.

Just then, as he gazed upon it, holding it just twelve inches in front of his nose, one hand was laid upon his shoulder, and another took the key from between his fingers.

He turned quickly, and his knees gave way, and he sank upon the floor, crying:

"Oh, Mr. Lala Roy, sir, Mr. Lala Roy, I am not the thief! I am innocent! I will tell you all about it! I will confess all to you! I will indeed! I will make atonement! Oh, what a miserable fool I've been!"

"Upon the heels of Folly," said the Sage, "treadeth Shame. You will now be able to understand the words of wisdom, which say of the wicked man, 'The curse of iniquity pursueth him; he liveth in continual fear; the anxiety of his mind taketh vengeance upon him.' Stand up and speak."

The Man in Possession looked on as if an incident of this kind was too common in families for him to take any notice of it. Nothing, in fact, is able to awaken astonishment in the heart of the Man in Possession, because nothing is sacred to him except the "sticks" he has to guard. To Iris, the event was, however, of importance, because it afforded Lala Roy a chance of giving Arnold that photograph, no other than an early portrait of Mr. Emblem's grandson.

CHAPTER XII. IS THIS HIS PHOTOGRAPH?

THE best way to get a talk with his cousin was to dine with her. Arnold there-

fore went to Chester Square next day with the photograph in his pocket. It was half an hour before dinner when he arrived, and Clara was alone.

"My dear," she cried with enthusiasm, "I am charmed—I am delighted—with Iris."

"I am glad," said Arnold mendaciously.

"I am delighted with her—in every way. She is more and better than I could have expected—far more. A few Americanisms, of course—"

"No doubt," said Arnold. "When I saw her I thought they rather resembled Anglicisms. But you have had opportunities of judging. You have in your own possession," he continued, "have you not, all the papers which establish her identity?"

"Oh yes; they are all locked up in my strong-box. I shall be very careful of them. Though, of course, there is no one who has to be satisfied except myself. And I am perfectly satisfied. But then I never had any doubt from the beginning. How could there be any doubt?"

"How, indeed?"

"Truth, honour, loyalty, and candour, as well as gentle descent, are written on that girl's noble brow, Arnold, plain, so that all may read. It is truly wonderful," she went on, "how the old gentle blood shows itself, and will break out under the most unexpected conditions. In her face she is not much like her father; that is true; though sometimes I catch a momentary resemblance, which instantly disappears again. Her eyes are not in the least like his, nor has she his manner, or carriage, or any of his little tricks and peculiarities—though, perhaps, I shall observe traces of some of them in time. But especially she resembles him in her voice. The tone—the timbre—reminds me every moment of my poor Claude."

"I suppose," said Arnold, "that one must inherit something, if it is only a voice, from one's father. Have you said anything to her yet about money matters, and a settlement of her claims?"

"No, not yet. I did venture, last night, to approach the subject, but she would not hear of it. So I dropped it. I call that true delicacy, Arnold—native, instinctive, hereditary delicacy."

"Have you given any more money to the American gentleman who brought her home?"

"Iris made him take a hundred pounds, against his will, to buy books with, for he

is not rich. Poor fellow! It went much against the grain with him to take the money. But she made him take it. She said he wanted books and instruments, and insisted on his having at least a hundred pounds. It was generous of her. Yes; she is—I am convinced—a truly generous girl, and as open-handed as the day. Now, would a common girl, a girl of no descent, have shown so much delicacy and generosity?"

"By the way, Clara, here is a photograph. Does it belong to you? I—I picked it up."

He showed the photograph which Lala Roy had given him.

"Oh yes; it is a likeness of Dr. Washington, Iris's adopted brother and guardian. She must have dropped it. I should think it was taken a few years back, but it is still a very good likeness. A handsome man, is he not? He grows upon one rather. His parting words with Iris yesterday were very dignified and touching."

"I will give it to her presently," he replied, without further comment.

There was, then, no doubt. The woman was an impostor, and the man was the thief, and the papers were the papers which had been stolen from the safe, and Iris Deseret was no other than his own Iris. But he must not show the least sign of suspicion.

"What are you thinking about, Arnold?" asked Clara. "Your face is as black as thunder. You are not sorry that Iris has returned, are you?"

"I was thinking of my engagement, Clara."

"Why, you are not tired of it already? An engaged man, Arnold, ought not to look so gloomy as that."

"I am not tired of it yet. But I am unhappy as regards some circumstances connected with it. Your disapproval, Clara, for one. My dear cousin, I owe so much to you, that I want to owe you more. Now, I have a proposition—a promise—to make to you. I am now so sure, so very sure and certain, that you will want me to marry Miss Aglen—and no one else—when you once know her, that I will engage solemnly not to marry her unless you entirely approve. Let me owe my wife to you, as well as everything else."

"Arnold, you are not in earnest?"

"Quite in earnest."

"But I shall never approve. Never—never—never! I could not bring myself,

under any circumstances that I can conceive, to approve of such a connection."

"My dear cousin, I am, on the other hand, perfectly certain that you will approve. Why, if I were not quite certain do you think I should have made this promise? But to return to your newly-found cousin. Tell me more about her."

"Well, I have discovered that she is a really very clever and gifted girl. She can imitate people in the most wonderful way, especially actresses, though she has only been to a theatre once or twice in her life. At Liverpool she heard some one sing what she calls a Topical Song, and this she actually remembers—she carried it away in her head, every word—and she can sing it just as they sing it on the stage, with all the vulgarity and gestures imitated to the very life. Of course I should not like her to do this before anybody else, but it is really wonderful."

"Indeed!" said Arnold. "It must be very clever and amusing."

"Of course," said Clara, with colossal ignorance, "an American lady can hardly be expected to understand English vulgarities. No doubt there is an American variety."

Arnold thought that a vulgar song could be judged at its true value by any lady, either American or English; but he said nothing.

And then the young lady herself appeared. She had been driving about with Clara among various shops, and now bore upon her person the charming result of these journeys, in the shape of a garment, which was rich in texture, and splendid in the making. And she really was a handsome girl, only with a certain air of being dressed for the stage. But Arnold, now more than suspicious, was not dazzled by the gorgeous raiment, and only considered how his cousin could for a moment imagine this person to be a lady, and how it would be best to break the news.

"Clara's cousin," she said, "I have forgotten your name; but how do you do, again?"

And then they went in to dinner.

"You have learned, I suppose," said Arnold, "something about the Deseret family by this time?"

"Oh yes; I have heard all about the family-tree. I dare say I shall get to know it by heart in time. But you don't expect me, all at once, to care much for it."

"Little Republican!" said Clara. "She

actually does not feel a pride in belonging to a good old family.'

The girl made a little gesture.

"Your family can't do much for you, that I can see, except to make you proud, and pretend not to see other women in the shop. That is what the county ladies do."

"Why, my dear, what on earth do you know of the county ladies?"

Lotty blushed a little. She had made a mistake. But she quickly recovered.

"I only know what I've read, cousin, about any kind of English ladies. But that's enough, I'm sure. Stuck-up things!"

And again she observed, from Clara's pained expression, that she had made another mistake.

If she showed a liking for stout at lunch, she manifested a positive passion for champagne at dinner.

"I do like the English custom," she said, "of having two dinners in the day."

"Ladies in America, I suppose," said Clara, "dine in the middle of the day?"

"Always."

"But I have visited many families in New York and Boston who dined late," said Arnold.

"Daresay," she replied carelessly. "I'm going to have some more of that curry stuff, please. And don't ask any more questions, anybody, till I've worried through with it. I'm a wolf at curry."

"She likes England, Arnold," said Clara, covering up this remark, so to speak. "She likes the country, she says, very much."

"At all events," said the girl, "I like this house, which is first-class—fine—proper. And the furniture, and pictures, and all—tip-top. But I'm afraid it is going to be awful dull, except at meals, and when the Boy is going." Her own head was just touched by the "Boy," and she was a little off her guard.

"My dear child," said Clara, "you have only just come, and you have not yet learned to know and love your own home and your father's friends. You must take a little time."

"Oh, I'll take time. As long as you like. But I shall soon be tired of sitting at home. I want to go about and see things—theatres and music-halls, and all kinds of places."

"Ladies, in England, do not go to music-halls," said Arnold.

"Gentlemen do. Why not ladies, then? Answer me that. Why can't ladies go, when gentlemen go? What is proper for

gentlemen is proper for ladies. Very well, then, I want to go somewhere every night. I want to see everything there is to see, and to hear all that there is to hear."

"We shall go, presently, a good deal into society," said Clara timidly. "Society will come back to town very soon now—at least, some of it."

"Oh yes, I dare say. Society! No, thank you, with company manners. I want to laugh, and talk, and enjoy myself."

The champagne, in fact, had made her forget the instructions of her tutor. At all events, she looked anything but "quiet," with her face flushed and her eyes bright. Suddenly she caught Arnold's expression of suspicion and watchfulness, and resolutely subdued a rising inclination to get up from the table and have a walk round with a snatch of a Topical Song.

"Forgive me, Clara," she murmured in her sweetest tone; "forgive me, cousin. I feel as if I must break out a bit, now and then. Yankee manners, you know. Let me stay quiet with you for a while. You know the thought of starched and stiff London society quite frightens me. I am not used to anything stiff. Let me stay at home quiet, with you."

"Dear girl!" cried Clara, her eyes filling with tears; "she has all Claude's affectionate softness of heart."

"I believe," said Arnold, later on in the evening, "that she must have been a circus-rider, or something of that sort. What on earth does Clara mean by the gentle blood breaking out? We nearly had a breaking out at dinner, but it certainly was not due to the gentle blood."

After dinner, Arnold found her sitting on a sofa with Clara, who was telling her something about the glories of the Deseret family. He was half inclined to pity the girl, or to laugh—he was not certain which—for the patience with which she listened, in order to make amends for any bad impression she might have produced at dinner. He asked her, presently, if she would play. She might be, and certainly was, vulgar; but she could play well and she knew good music. People generally think that good music softens manners, and does not permit those who play and practise it to be vulgar. But, concerning this young person, so much could not be said with any truth.

"You play very well. Where did you learn? Who was your master?" Arnold asked.

She began to reply, but stopped short. He had very nearly caught her.

"Don't ask questions," she said. "I told you not to ask questions before. Where should I learn, but in America? Do you suppose no one can play the piano, except in England? Look here," she glanced at her cousin. "Do you, Mr. Arbuthnot, always spend your evenings like this?"

"How like this?"

"Why, going around in a swallow-tail to drawing-rooms with the women, like a tame tom-cat? If you do, you must be a truly good young man. If you don't, what do you do?"

"Very often, I spend my evenings in a drawing-room."

"Oh, Lord! Do most young Englishmen carry on in the same proper way?"

"Why not?"

"Don't they go to music-halls, please, and dancing cribs, and such?"

"Perhaps. But what does it concern us to know what some men do?"

"Oh, not much. Only if I were a man like you, I wouldn't consent to be a tame tom-cat—that is all; but perhaps you like it."

She meant to insult and offend him so that he should not come any more.

But she did not succeed. He only laughed, feeling that he was getting below the surface, and sat down beside the piano.

"You amuse me," he said, "and you astonish me. You are, in fact, the most astonishing person I ever met. For instance, you come from America, and you talk pure London slang with a cockney twang. How did it get there?"

In fact, it was not exactly London slang, but a patois or dialect, learned partly from her husband, partly from her companions, and partly brought from Gloucester.

"I don't know—I never asked. It came wrapped up in brown paper, perhaps, with a string round it."

"You have lived in America all your life, and you look more like an Englishwoman than any other girl I have ever seen."

"Do I? So much the better for the English girls; they can't do better than take after me. But perhaps—most likely, in fact—you think that American girls all squint, perhaps, or have got hump-backs? Anything else?"

"You were brought up in a little American village, and yet you play in the style of a girl who has had the best masters."

She did not explain—it was not necessary to explain—that her master had been her father, who was a teacher of music.

"I can't help it, can I?" she asked; "I can't help it if I turned out different to what you expected. People sometimes do, you know. And when you don't approve of a girl, it's English manners, I suppose, to tell her so—kind of encourages her to persevere, and pray for better luck next time, doesn't it? It's simple, too, and prevents any foolish errors—no mistake afterwards, you see. I say, are you going to come here often? because, if you are, I shall go away back to the States or somewhere, or stay upstairs in my own room. You and me won't get on very well together, I am afraid."

"I don't think you will see me very often," he replied. "That is improbable; yet I dare say I shall come here as often as I usually do."

"What do you mean by that?" She looked sharply and suspiciously at him. He repeated his words, and she perceived that there was meaning in them, and she felt uneasy.

"I don't understand at all," she said; "Clara tells me that this house is mine. Now—don't you know—I don't intend to invite any but my own friends to visit me in my own house."

"That seems reasonable. No one can expect you to invite people who are not your friends."

"Well, then, I ain't likely to call you my friend"—Arnold inclined his head—"and I am not going to talk riddles any more. Is there anything else you want to say?"

"Nothing more, I think, at present, thank you."

"If there is, you know, don't mind me—have it out—I'm nobody, of course. I'm not expected to have any manners—I'm only a girl. You can say what you please to me, and be as rude as you please; Englishmen always are as rude as they can be to American girls—I've always heard that."

Arnold laughed.

"At all events," he said, "you have charmed Clara, which is the only really important thing. Good-night Miss—Miss Deseret."

"Good-night, old man," she said, laughing, because she bore no malice, and had given him a candid opinion; "I dare say when you get rid of your fine company manners, and put off your swallow-tail,

you're not a bad sort, after all. Perhaps, if you would confess, you are as fond of a kick-up on your way home as anybody. Trust you quiet chaps!"

Clara had not fortunately heard much of this conversation, which, indeed, was not meant for her, because the girl was playing all the time some waltz music, which enabled her to talk and play without being heard at the other end of the room.

Well, there was now no doubt. The American physician and the subject of the photograph were certainly the same man. And this man was also the thief of the safe, and Iris Aglen was Iris Deseret. Of that, Arnold had no longer any reasonable doubt. There was, however, one thing more. Before leaving Clara's house, he refreshed his memory as to the Deseret arms. The quarterings of the shield were, so far, exactly what Mr. Emblem recollected.

"It is," said Lala Roy, "what I thought. But, as yet, not a word to Iris."

He then proceeded to relate the repentance, the confession, and the atonement proposed by the remorseful James. But he did not tell quite all. For the wise man never tells all. What really happened was this. When James had made a clean breast and confessed his enormous share in the villainy, Lala Roy bound him over to secrecy under pain of Law—Law the Rigorous, pointing out that although they do not, in England, exhibit the Kourbash, or bastinado the soles of the feet, they make the prisoner sleep on a hard board, starve him on skilly, set him to work which tears his nails from his fingers, keep him from conversation, tobacco, and drink, and when he comes out, so hedge him around with prejudice and so clothe him with a robe of shame, that no one will ever employ him again, and he is therefore doomed to go back again to the English Hell. Lala Roy, though a man of few words, drew so vivid a description of the punishment which awaited his penitent that James, foxy as he was by nature, felt constrained to resolve that henceforth, happen what might, then and for all future, he would range himself on the side of virtue, and as a beginning he promised to do everything that he could for the confounding of Joseph and the bringing of the guilty to justice.

CHAPTER XIII. HIS LAST CHANCE.

THREE days elapsed, during which nothing was done. That cause is strongest

which can afford to wait. But in those three days several things happened.

First of all, Mr. David Chalker, seeing that the old man was obdurate, made up his mind to lose most of his money, and cursed Joe continually for having led him to build upon his grandfather's supposed wealth. Yet he ought to have known. Tradesmen do not lock up their savings in investments for their grandchildren, nor do they borrow small sums at ruinous interest of money-lending solicitors; nor do they give Bills of Sale. These general rules were probably known to Mr. Chalker. Yet he did not apply them to this particular case. The neglect of the General Rule, in fact, may lead the most astute of mankind into ways of foolishness.

James, for his part, stimulated perpetually by fear of prison and loss of character and of situation—for who would employ an Assistant who got keys made to open the safe?—showed himself the most repentant of mortals. Dr. Joseph Washington, lulled into the most perfect security, enjoyed all those pleasures which the sum of three hundred pounds could purchase. Nobody knew where he was, or what he was doing. As for Lotty, she had established herself firmly in Chester Square, and Cousin Clara daily found out new and additional proofs of the gentle blood breaking out!

On the fourth morning Lala Roy sallied forth. He was about to make a great Moral Experiment, the nature of which you will immediately understand. None but a philosopher who had studied Confucius and Lao Kiun, would have conceived so fine a scheme.

First he paid a visit to Mr. Chalker.

The office was the ground-floor front room, in one of the small streets north of the King's Road. It was not an imposing office, nor did it seem as if much business was done there; and one clerk of tender years sufficed for Mr. Chalker's wants.

"Oh!" he said, "it's our friend from India. You're a lodger of old Emblem's, ain't you?"

"I have lived with him for twenty years. I am his friend."

"Very well. I dare say we shall come to terms, if he's come to his senses. Just take a chair and sit down. How is the old man?"

"He has not yet recovered the use of his intellect."

"Oh! Then how can you act for him if he's off his head?"

"I came to ask an English creditor to show mercy."

"Mercy? What is the man talking about? Mercy! I want my money. What has that got to do with mercy?"

"Nothing, truly; but I will give you your money. I will give you justice, and you shall give me mercy. You lent Mr. Emblem fifty pounds. Will you take your fifty pounds, and leave us in peace?"

He drew a bag out of his pocket—a brown banker's bag—and Mr. Chalker distinctly heard the rustling of notes.

This is a sound which to some ears is more delightful than the finest music in the world. It awakens all the most pleasurable emotions; it provokes desire and hankering after possession; and it fills the soul with the imaginary enjoyment of wealth.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Chalker, confident that better terms than those would be offered. "If that is all you have to say, you may go away again."

"But the rest is usury. Think! To give fifty, and ask three hundred and fifty, is the part of a usurer."

"Call it what you please. The Bill of Sale is for three hundred and fifty pounds. Pay that three hundred and fifty, with costs and Sheriff's poundage, and I take away my man. If you don't pay it, then the books on the shelves and the furniture of the house go to the hammer."

"The books, I am informed," said Lala Roy, "will not bring as much as a hundred pounds if they are sold at auction. As for the furniture, some of it is mine, and some belongs to Mr. Emblem's granddaughter."

"His granddaughter! Oh, it's a swindle," said Mr. Chalker angrily. "It is nothing more or less than a rank swindle. The old man ought to be prosecuted, and, mind you, I'll prosecute him, and you too, for conspiring with him."

"A prosecution," said the Hindoo, "will not hurt him, but it might hurt you. For it would show how you lent him fifty pounds five years ago; how you made him give you a bill for a hundred; how you did not press him to pay that bill, but you continually offered to renew it for him, increasing the amount on each time of renewal; and at last you made him give you a Bill of Sale for three hundred and fifty. This is, I suppose, one of the many ways in which Englishmen grow rich. There are also usurers in India, but they do not, in my country, call themselves lawyers. A prosecution? My friend, it

is for us to prosecute. Shall we show that you have done the same thing with many others? You are, by this time, well known in the neighbourhood, Mr. Chalker, and you are so much beloved that there are many who would be delighted to relate their experiences and dealings with so clever a man. Have you ever studied, one asks with wonder, the precepts of the great Sage who founded your religion?"

"Oh, come, don't let us have any religious nonsense!"

"I assure you they are worth studying. I am, myself, an humble follower of Gautama, but I have read those Precepts with profit. In the kingdom imagined by that Preacher, there is no room for usurers, Mr. Chalker. Where, then, will be your kingdom? Every man must be somewhere. You must have a kingdom and a king."

"This is tomfoolery!" Mr. Chalker turned red, and looked very uncomfortable. "Stick to business. Payment in full. Those are my terms."

"You think, then, that the Precepts of your Sage are only intended for men while they sit in the church? Many Englishmen think so, I have observed."

"Payment in full, mister. That's what I want."

He banged his fist on the table.

"No abatement? No mercy shown to an old man on the edge of the grave? Think, Mr. Chalker. You will soon be as old as Mr. Emblem, your hair as white, your reason as unsteady——"

"Payment in full, and no more words."

"It is well. Then, Mr. Chalker, I have another proposal to make to you."

"I thought we should come to something more. Out with it!"

"I believe you are a friend of Mr. Emblem's grandson?"

"Joe? Oh yes, I know Joe."

"You know him intimately?"

"Yes, I may say so."

"You know that he forged his grandfather's name; that he is a profligate and a spendthrift, and that he has taken or borrowed from his grandfather whatever money he could get, and that—in short, he is a friend of your own?"

It was not until after his visitor had gone that Mr. Chalker understood, and began to resent this last observation.

"Go on," he said. "I know all about Joe."

"Good. Then if you can tell me anything about him which may be of use to me I will do this. I will pay you double

the valuation of Mr. Emblem's shop, in return for a receipt in full. If you can not, you may proceed to sell everything by auction."

Mr. Chalker hesitated. A valuation would certainly give a higher figure than a forced sale, and then that valuation doubled!

"Well," he said, "I don't know. It's a cruel hard case to be done out of my money. How am I to find out whether anything I tell you would be of use to you or not? What kind of thing do you want? How do I know that if you get what you want, you won't swear it is of no use to you?"

"You have the word of one who never broke his word."

Mr. Chalker laughed derisively.

"Why," he said, "I wouldn't take the word of an English Bishop—no, nor of an Archbishop—where money is concerned. What is it—what is the kind of thing you want to know?"

"It is concerned with a certain woman."

"Oh, well, if it is only a woman. I thought it might be something about money. Joe, you see, like a good many other people, has got his own ideas about money, and perhaps he isn't so strict in his dealings as he might be—few men are—and I should not like to let out one or two things that only him and me know." In fact, Mr. Chalker saw, in imagination, the burly form of Joe in his office, brandishing a stick, and accusing him of friendship's trust betrayed. "But as it is only a woman—which of 'em is it?"

"This is a young woman, said to be handsome, tall, and finely-made; she has, I am told, light brown hair and large eyes. That is the description of her given to me."

"I know the girl you mean. Splendid figure, and goes well in tights?"

"I have not been informed on that subject. Can you tell me any more about her?"

"I suspect, mister," said Joe's friend, with cunning eyes, "that you've made the acquaintance of a certain widow that was—married woman that is. I remember now, I've seen Hindoos about her lodgings, down Shadwell way."

"Perhaps," said Lala, "and perhaps not." His face showed not the least sign which could be read. "You can tell me afterwards what you know of the woman at Shadwell."

"Well, then, Joe thinks I know nothing about it. Else I wouldn't tell you. Because I don't want a fight with Joe. Is

this any use to you? He is married to the girl as well as to the widow."

"He is married to the girl as well as to the widow. He has, then, two wives. It is against the English custom, and breaks the English law. The young wife who is beautiful, and the old wife who has the lodging-house. Very good. What is the address of this woman?"

Mr. Chalker looked puzzled.

"Don't you know it, then? What are you driving at?"

"What is the name and address of this Shadwell woman?"

"Well, then"—he wrote an address and handed it over—"you may be as close as you like. I don't care. It isn't my business. But you won't make me believe you don't know all about her. Look here, whatever happens, don't say I told you."

"It shall be a secret," said Lala, taking out the bag of notes. "Let us complete the business at once, Mr. Chalker. Here is another offer. I will give you two hundred pounds in discharge of your whole claim, or you shall have a valuation made, if you prefer it, and I will double the amount."

Mr. Chalker chose the former promptly, and in a few moments handed over the necessary receipts, and sent his clerk to recall the Man in Possession.

"What are you going to do with Joe?" he asked. "No good turn, I'll swear. And a more unforgiving face than yours I never set eyes on. It isn't my business, but I'll give you one warning. If you make Joe desperate, he'll turn on you; and Lord help your slender ribs if Joe once begins. Don't make him desperate. And now I'll tell you another thing. First, the woman at Shadwell is horribly jealous. She'll make a row. Next, the young one, who sings at a Music Hall, she's desperately in love with her husband—more than he is with her—and if a woman's in love with a man, there's one thing she never forgives. You understand what that is. Between the pair, Joe's likely to have a rough time."

"I do. I have had many wives myself."

"Oh, Lord, he says he's had many wives! How many?"

Lala Roy read the receipt, and put it in his pocket. Then he rose and remarked, with a smile of supreme superiority:

"It is a pleasure to give money to you, and to such as you, Mr. Chalker."

"Is it?" he replied with a grin. "Give me some more, then."

"You are one of those who, the richer they become, the less harm they do. Many Englishmen are of this disposition. When they are poor they are jackals, hyenas, wolves, and man-eating tigers; when they are rich they are benevolent and charitable, and show mercy unto the wretched and the poor. So that, in their case, the words of the Wise Man are naught, when he says that the earth is barren of good things where she hoardeth treasure; and that where gold is in her bowels no herb groweth. Pray, Mr. Chalker, pray earnestly for gold in order that you may become virtuous."

Mr. Chalker grinned, but looked uncomfortable.

"I will, mister," he said, "I will pray with all my might."

Nevertheless, he remained for the space of the whole morning in uneasiness. The words of the Philosopher troubled him. I do not go so far as to say that his mind went back to the days when he was young and innocent, because he was still young, and he never had been innocent; nor do I say that a tear rose to his eyes and trickled down his cheek, because nothing brought tears into his eyes except a speck of dust; or that he resolved to confine himself for the future to legitimate lawyer's work, because he would then have starved. I only say that he felt uncomfortable and humiliated, and chiefly so because an old man with white hair and a brown skin—hang it! a common Nigger—had been able to bring discord into the sweet harmony of his thoughts.

Lala Roy then betook himself to Joe's former lodgings, and asked for that gentleman's present address.

The landlady professed to know nothing.

"You do know, however," he persisted, reading knowledge in her eyes.

"Is it trouble you mean for him?" asked the woman, "and him such a fine, well-set-up young man, too! Is it trouble? Oh, dear, I always thought he got his money on the cross. Look here. I ain't going to round on him, though he has gone away and left a comfortable room. So there! And you may go."

Lala Roy opened his hand. There were at least five golden sovereigns glorifying his dingy palm.

"Can gold," the Moralist asked, "ever increase the virtue of man? Woman, how much?"

"Is it trouble?" she repeated, looking greedily at the money. "Will the young man get copped?"

Lala understood no London slang. But he showed his hand again.

"How much? Whoso is covetous let him know that his heart is poor. How much?"

"Poor young man! I'll take them all, please, sir. What's he done?"

"Where does he live?"

"I know where he lives," she said, "because our Bill rode away with him at the back of his cab, and saw where he got out. He's married now, and his wife sings at the Music Hall, and he lives on her earnings. Quite the gentleman he is now, and smokes cigars all day long. There's his address, and thank you for the money. Oh," she said with a gasp. "To think that people can earn five pounds so easy."

"May the gold procure you happiness—such happiness as you desire!" said Lala Roy.

"It will nearly pay the quarter's rent. And that's about happiness enough for one morning."

Joe was sitting in his room alone, half asleep. In fact, he had a head upon him. He sprang to his feet, however, when he saw Lala Roy.

"Hallo!" he cried. "You here, Nig? How the devil did you find out my address?"

There was not only astonishment, but some alarm upon his countenance.

"Never mind. I want a little conversation with you, Mr. Joseph."

"Well, sit down and let us have it out. I say, have you come to tell me that you did sneak those papers, after all? What did you get for them?"

"I have not come to tell you that. I dare say, however, we shall be able, some day, to tell you who did steal the papers—if any were stolen, that is."

"Quite so, my jolly mariner. If any were stolen. Ho, ho! you've got to prove that first, haven't you? How's the old man?"

"He is ill; he is feeble with age; he is weighed down with misfortune. I am come, Mr. Joseph, to ask your help for him."

"My help for him? Why, can't he help himself?"

"Four or five years ago he incurred a debt for one who forged his name. He needed not to have paid that money, but he saved a man from prison."

"Who was that? Who forged his name?"

"I do not name that man, whose end will be confusion, unless he repent and

make amends. This debt has grown until it is too large for him to pay it. Unless it is paid, his whole property, his very means of living, will be sold by the creditor."

"How can I pay him back? It is three hundred and fifty pounds now," said Joseph.

"Man, thou hast named thyself."

Joseph stammered but blustered still.

"Well—then—what the devil do you mean—you and your forgery?"

"Forgery is one crime; you have since committed, perhaps, others. Think. You have been saved once from prison. Will anyone save you a second time? How have you shown your gratitude? Will you now do something for your benefactor?"

"What do you mean, I say? What do you mean with your forgery and prison? Hang me, if I oughtn't to kick you out of the room. I would, too, if you were ten years younger. Do you know, sir, that you are addressing an officer and a gentleman?"

"There is sometimes, even at the very end, a door opened for repentance. The door is open now. Young man, once more, consider. Your grandfather is old and destitute. Will you help him?"

Joseph hesitated.

"I don't believe he is poor. He has saved up all his money for the girl; let her help him."

"You are wrong. He has saved nothing. His granddaughter maintains herself by teaching. He has not a penny. You have got from him and you have spent all the money he had."

"He ought to have saved."

"He could, at least, have lived by his calling but for you and for this debt which was incurred for you. He is ruined by it. What will you do for him?"

"I am not going to do anything for him," said Joseph. "Is it likely? Did he ever have anything but a scowl for me?"

"He who injures another is always in the wrong. You will, then, do nothing? Think. It is the open door. He is your grandfather; he has kept you from starvation when you were turned out of office for drink and dishonesty. I hear that you now have money. I have been told that you have been seen to show a large sum of money. Will you give him some?"

As a matter of fact, Joe had been, the night before, having a festive evening at the Music Hall, from which his wife was absent, owing to temporary indisposition. While there, he took so much Scotch whisky and water that his tongue was

loosened and he became boastful; and that to so foolish an extent that he actually brandished in the eyes of the multitude a whole handful of bank-notes. He now remembered this, and was greatly struck by the curious fact that Lala Roy should seem to know it.

"I haven't got any money. It was all brag last night. I couldn't help my grandfather if I wanted to."

"You have what is left of three hundred pounds," said Lala Roy.

"If I said that last night," replied Joe, "I must have been drunker than I thought. You old fool! the flimsies were duffers. Where do you think I could raise three hundred pounds? No, no—I'm sorry for the old man, but I can't help him. I'm going to sea again in a day or two. We jolly sailors don't make much money, but if a pound or two, when I come home, will be of any use to him, he's only got to say the word. After all, I believe it's a kid, got up between you. The old man must have saved something."

"You will suffer him, then, even to be taken to the workhouse?"

"Why, I can't help it, and I suppose you'll have to go there too. Ho, ho! I say, Nig!" He began to laugh. "Ho, ho! They won't let you wear that old fez of yours at the workhouse. How beautiful you'll look in the workhouse uniform, won't you? I'll come home, and bring you some baccy. Now you can cheese it, old 'un."

"I will go, if that is what you mean. It is the last time that you will be asked to help your grandfather. The door is closed. You have had one more chance, and you have thrown it away."

So he departed, and Joe, who was of a self-reliant and sanguine disposition, thought nothing of the warning, which was therefore thrown away and wasted.

As for Lala, he called a cab, and drove to Shadwell. And if any man ever felt that he was an Instrument set apart to carry out a Scheme of Vengeance, that Hindoo Philosopher felt like one. The Count of Monte Christo himself was not more filled with the Faith and Conviction of his Divine obligation.

In the afternoon he returned to Chelsea, and perhaps one who knew him might have remarked upon his face something like a gleam of satisfaction. He had done his duty.

It was now five days since the fatal discovery. Mr. Emblem still remained upstairs in his chair; but he was slowly

recovering. He clearly remembered that he had been robbed, and the principal sign of the shock was his firm conviction that by his own exercise of memory Iris had been enabled to enter into possession of her own.

As regards the Bill of Sale, he had clean forgotten it. Now, in the morning, there happened a thing which surprised James very much. The Man in Possession was recalled. He went away. So that the money must have been paid. James was so astonished that he ran upstairs to tell Iris.

"Then," said the girl, "we shall not be turned out after all. But who has paid the money?"

It could have been no other than Arnold. Yet when, later in the day, he was taxed with having committed the good action, Arnold stoutly denied it. He had not so much money in the world, he said; in fact, he had no money at all.

"The good man," said the Philosopher, "has friends of whom he knoweth not. As the river returns its waters to the sea, so the heart rejoiceth in returning benefits received."

"Oh, Lala," said Iris. "But on whom have we conferred any benefits?"

"The moon shines upon all alike," said Lala, "and knows not what she illumines."

"Lala Roy," said Arnold, suddenly getting a gleam of intelligence, "it is you who have paid this money."

"You, Lala?"

"No one else could have paid it," said Arnold.

"But I thought—I thought——" said Iris.

"You thought I had no money at all. Children, I have some. One may live without money in Hindostan, but in England even the Philosopher cannot meditate unless he can pay for food and shelter. I have money, Iris, and I have paid the usurer enough to satisfy him. Let us say no more."

"Oh, Lala!" The tears came to Iris's eyes. "And now we shall go on living as before."

"I think not," he replied. "In the generations of Man, the seasons continue side by side; but spring does not always continue with winter."

"I know, now," interrupted Mr. Emblem, suddenly waking into life and recollection; "I could not remember at first. Now I know very well, but I cannot tell how, that

the man who stole my papers is my own grandson. James would not steal. James is curious; he wants to read over my shoulders what I am writing. He would pry and find out. But he would not steal. It doesn't matter much—does it?—since I was able to repair the loss—I always had a most excellent memory—and Iris has now received her inheritance; but it is my grandson Joe who has stolen the papers. My daughter's son came home from Australia when—but this I learned afterwards—he had already disgraced himself there. He ran into debt, and I paid his debts; he forged my name and I accepted the Bill; he took all the money I could let him have, and still he asked for more. There is no one in the world who would rob me of those papers except Joseph."

Now, the door was open to the staircase, and the door of communication between the shop and the house—passage was also open. This seems a detail hardly worth noting; yet it proved of the greatest importance. From such small trifles follow great events. Observe that as yet no positive proof was in the hands of the two conspirators which would actually connect Iris with Claude Deseret. The proofs were in the stolen papers, and though Clara had those papers, who was to show that these papers were actually those in the sealed packet?

When Mr. Emblem finished speaking, no one replied, because Arnold and Lala knew the facts already, but did not wish to spread them abroad; and next, because to Iris it was nothing new that her cousin was a bad man, and because she thought, now that the Man in Possession was gone, they might just as well forget the papers, and go on as if all this fuss had not happened.

In the silence that followed this speech, they heard the voice of James downstairs, saying:

"I am sorry to say, sir, that Mr. Emblem is ill upstairs, and you can't see him to-day."

"Ill, is he? I am very sorry. Take him my compliments, James. Mr. Frank Farrar's compliments, and tell him——"

And then Mr. Emblem sprang to his feet, crying:

"Stop him! stop him! Go downstairs, someone, and stop him! I don't know where he lives. Stop him! stop him!"

Arnold rushed down the stairs. He found in the shop an elderly gentleman, carrying a bundle of books. It was, in fact,

Mr. Farrar come to negotiate the sale of another work from his library.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Arnold, "Mr. Emblem is most anxious to see you. Would you step upstairs?"

"Quick, Mr. Farrar—quick," the old man held him tight by the hand. "Tell me before my memory runs away with me again—tell me. Listen, Iris! Yet it doesn't matter, because you have already— Tell me——" He seemed about to wander again, but he pulled himself together with a great effort. "You knew my son-in-law before his marriage."

"Surely, Mr. Emblem; I knew your son-in-law, and his father, and all his people."

"And his name was not Aglen, at all?" asked Arnold.

"No; he took the name of Aglen from a fancied feeling of pride when he quarrelled with his father about—well, it was about his marriage, as you know, Mr. Emblem; he came to London, and tried to make his way by writing, and thought to do it, and either to hide a failure or brighten a success, by using a pseudonym. People were more jealous about their names in those days. He had better," added the unsuccessful veteran of letters, "he had far better have made his living as a—as a"—he looked about him for a fitting simile—"as a book-seller."

"Then, sir," said Arnold, "what was his real name?"

"His name was Claude Deseret, of course."

"Iris," said Arnold, taking her hand, "this is the last proof. We have known it for four or five days, but we wanted the final proof, and now we have it. My dear, you are the cousin of Clara Holland, and all her fortune, by her grandfather's will, is yours. This is the secret of the safe. This was what the stolen papers told you."

CHAPTER XIV. THE HAND OF FATE.

At the first stroke of noon next day, Arnold arrived at his cousin's house in Chester Square. He was accompanied by Iris, by Lala Roy, and by Mr. Frank Farrar.

"Pray, Arnold, what is meant by all this mystery?" asked Clara, receiving him and his party with considerable surprise.

"I will explain all in a few minutes, my dear Clara. Meanwhile, have you done what you promised?"

"Yes. I wrote to Dr. Washington. He will be here, I expect, in a few minutes."

"You wrote exactly in the form of words you promised me?"

"Yes, exactly. I asked him to meet me here this morning at a quarter past twelve, in order to discuss a few points connected with Iris's future arrangements, before he left for America, and I wrote on the envelope, 'Immediate and important.'"

"Very well. He will be sure to come, I think. Perhaps your cousin will insist upon another cheque for fifty pounds being given to him."

"Arnold, you are extremely suspicious and most ungenerous about Dr. Washington, on whose truth and disinterested honesty I thoroughly rely."

"We shall see. Meanwhile, Clara, I desire to present to you a young lady of whom we have already spoken. This is Miss Aglen, who is, I need hardly say, deeply anxious to win your good opinion. And this is Lala Roy, an Indian gentleman who knew her father, and has lived in the same house with her for twenty years. Our debt—I shall soon be able to say your debt—of gratitude to this gentleman for his long kindness to Miss Aglen—is one which can never be repaid."

Clara gave the most frigid bow to both Iris and Lala Roy.

"Really, Arnold, you are talking in enigmas this morning. What am I to understand? What has this gentleman to do with my appointment with Dr. Washington?"

"My dear cousin, I am so happy this morning that I wonder I do not talk in conundrums, or rondeaux, or terza rima. It is a mere chance, I assure you. Perhaps I may break out in rhymes presently. This evening we will have fireworks in the square, roast a whole ox, invite the neighbours, and dance about a maypole. You shall lead off the dance, Clara."

"Pray go on, Arnold. All this is very inexplicable."

"This gentleman, however, is a very old friend of yours, Clara. Do you not recognise Mr. Frank Farrar, who used to stay at the Hall in the old days?"

"I remember Mr. Farrar very well." Clara gave him her hand. "But I should not have known him. Why have we never met in society during all these years, Mr. Farrar?"

"I suppose because I have been out of society, Miss Holland," said the scholar. "When a man marries, and has a large

family, and a small income, and grows old, and has to see the young fellows shoving him out at every point, he doesn't care much about society. I hope you are well and happy."

"I am very well, and I ought to be happy, because I have recovered Claude's lost heiress, my cousin, Iris Deseret, and she is the best and most delightful of girls, with the warmest heart and the sweetest instincts of a lady by descent and birth."

She looked severely at Arnold, who said nothing, but smiled incredulously.

Mr. Farrar looked from Iris to Miss Holland, bewildered.

"And why do you come to see me to-day, Mr. Farrar—and with Arnold?"

"Because I have undertaken to answer one question presently, which Mr. Arbuthnot is to ask me. That is why I am here. Not but what it gives me the greatest pleasure to see you again, Miss Holland, after so many years."

"Our poor Claude died in America, you know, Mr. Farrar."

"So I have recently heard."

"And left one daughter."

"That also I have learned." He looked at Iris.

"She is with me, here in this house, and has been with me for a week. You may understand, Mr. Farrar, the happiness I feel in having with me Claude's only daughter."

Mr. Farrar looked from her to Arnold with increasing amazement. But he said nothing.

"I have appointed this morning, at Arnold's request," Clara went on, "to have an interview, perhaps the last, with the gentleman who brought my dear Iris from America. I say, at Arnold's request, because he asked me to do this, and I have always trusted him implicitly, and I hope he is not going to bring trouble upon us now, although I do not, I confess, understand the presence of his friends or their connection with my cousin."

"My dear Clara," said Arnold again, "I ask for nothing but patience. And that only for a few moments. As for the papers, you have them all in your possession?"

"Yes; they are locked up in my strong box."

"Do not, on any account, give them to anybody. However, after this morning you will not be asked. Have you taken as yet any steps at all for the transference of your property to—the rightful heir?"

"Not yet."

"Thank goodness! And now, Clara, I will ask you, as soon as Dr. Washington and—your cousin—are in the drawing-room, to ring the bell. You need not explain why. We will answer the summons, and we will give all the explanations that may be required."

"I will not have my cousin vexed, Arnold."

"You shall not. Your cousin shall never be vexed by me as long as I live."

"And Dr. Washington must not be in any way offended. Consider the feelings of an American gentleman, Arnold. He is my guest."

"You may thoroughly rely upon my consideration for the feelings of an American gentleman. Go; there is a knock at the door. Go to receive him, and, when both are in the room, ring the bell."

Joe was in excellent spirits that morning. His interview with Lala Roy convinced him that nothing whatever was known of the papers, therefore nothing could be suspected. What a fool, he thought, must be his grandfather, to have had these papers in his hands for eighteen years and never to have opened the packet, in obedience to the injunction of a dead man! Had it been his own case, he would have opened the papers without the least delay, mastered the contents, and instantly claimed the property. He would have gone on to use it for his own purposes and private gain, and with an uninterrupted run of eighteen years, he would most certainly have made a very pretty thing out of it.

However, everything works well for him who greatly dares. His wife would manage for him better than he could do it for himself. Yet a few weeks, and the great fortune would fall into his hands. He walked all the way to Chester Square, considering how he should spend the money. There are some forms of foolishness, such as, say, those connected with art, literature, charity, and work for others, which attract some rich men, but which he was not at all tempted to commit. There were others, however, connected with horses, races, betting, and gambling, which tempted him strongly. In fact, Joseph contemplated spending this money wholly on his own pleasures. Probably it would be a part of his pleasure to toss a few crumbs to his wife.

It is sad to record that Lotty, finding

herself received with so much enthusiasm, had already begun to fall off in her behaviour. Even Clara, who thought she discovered every hour some new point of resemblance in the girl to her father, was fain to admit that the "Americanisms" were much too pronounced for general society.

Her laugh was louder and more frequent; her jests were rough and common; she used slang words freely; her gestures were extravagant, and she walked in the streets as if she wished everyone to notice her. It is the walk of the Music Hall stage, and the trick of it consists chiefly in giving, so to speak, prominence to the shoulders and oscillation to the skirts. In fact, she was one of those ladies who ardently desire that all the world should notice them.

Further, in her conversation, she showed an acquaintance with certain phases of the English lower life which was astonishing in an American girl. But Clara had no suspicion—none whatever.

One thing the girl did which pleased her mightily.

She was never tired of hearing about her father, and his way of looking, standing, walking, folding his hands, and holding himself. And constantly more and more Clara detected these little tricks in his daughter. Perhaps she learned them.

"My dear," she said, "to think that I ever thought you unlike your dear father!"

So that it made her extremely uncomfortable to detect a certain reserve in Arnold towards the girl, and then a dislike of Arnold in the girl herself. However, she was accustomed to act by Arnold's advice, and consented, when he asked her, to arrange so that Arnold might meet Dr. Washington. As if anything that so much as looked like suspicion could be thought of for a moment!

But the bell rang, and Arnold, followed by his party, led the way from the morning-room to the drawing-room. Dr. Joseph Washington was standing with his back to the door. The girl was dressed as if she had just come from a walk, and was holding Clara's hand.

"Yes, madam," he was saying softly, "I return to-morrow to America, and my wife and my children. I leave our dear girl in the greatest confidence in your hands. I only venture to advise that, to avoid lawyers' expenses, you should simply instruct somebody—the right person—to transfer the property from your name to

the name of Iris. Then you will be saved troubles and formalities of every kind. As for me, my home is in America——"

"No, Joseph," said Lala Roy gently; "it is in Shadwell."

"It is a lie!" he cried, starting; "it is an infernal lie!"

"Iris," said Arnold, "lift your veil, my dear. Mr. Farrar, who is this young lady? Look upon this face, Clara."

"This is the daughter of Claude Deseret," said Mr. Farrar, "if she is the daughter of the man who married Alice Emblem, and went by the name of Aglen."

Clara turned a terrified face to Arnold.

"Arnold, help me!"

"Whose face is this?" he repeated.

"It is—Good Heavens!—it is the face of your portrait. It is Claude's face again. They are his very eyes——" She covered her face with her hands. "Oh, Arnold, what is it! Who is this other?"

"This other lady, Clara, is a Music Hall Singer, who calls herself Carlotta Claridane, wife of this man, who is not an American at all, but the grandson of Mr. Emblem, the bookseller, and therefore cousin of Iris. It is he who robbed his grandfather of the papers which you have in your possession, Clara. And this is an audacious conspiracy, which we have been so fortunate as to unearth and detect, step by step."

"Oh, can such wickedness be?" said Clara; "and in my house, too?"

"Joe," said Lotty, "the game is up. I knew it wouldn't last."

"Let them prove it," said Joe; "let them prove it. I defy you to prove it."

"Don't be a fool, Joe," said his wife. "Remember," she whispered, "you've got a pocketful of money. Let us go peaceably."

"As for you, Nigger," said Joe, "I'll break every bone in your body."

"Not here," said Arnold; "there will be no breaking of bones in this house."

Lotty began to laugh.

"The gentle blood always shows itself, doesn't it?" she said. "I've got the real instincts of a lady, haven't I? Oh, it was beautiful while it lasted. And every day more and more like my father."

"Arnold," cried poor Clara, crushed, "help me!"

"Come," said Arnold, "you had better go at once."

"I won't laugh at you," said Lotty. "It's a shame, and you're a good old thing. But it did me good, it really did, to hear all about the gentle blood. Come, Joe. Let us go away quietly."

She took her husband's arm. Joe was standing sullen and desperate. Mr. Chalker was right. It wanted very little more to make him fall upon the whole party, and go off with a fight.

"Young woman," said Lala Roy, "you had better not go outside the house with the man. It will be well for you to wait until he has gone."

"Why? He is my husband, whatever we have done, and I'm not ashamed of him."

"Is he your husband? Ask him what I meant when I said his home was at Shadwell."

"Come, Lotty," said Joe, with a curious change of manner. "Let us go at once."

"Wait," Lala repeated. "Wait, young woman, let him go first. Pray—pray let him go first."

"Why should I wait? I go with my husband."

"I thought to save you from shame. But if you will go with him, ask him again why his home is at Shadwell, and why he left his wife."

Lotty sprang upon her husband, and caught his wrists with both hands.

"Joe, what does he mean? Tell me he is a liar."

"That would be useless," said Lala Roy. "Because a very few minutes will prove the contrary. Better, however, that he should go to prison for marrying two wives than for robbing his grandfather's safe."

"It's a lie!" Joe repeated, looking as dangerous as a wild boar brought to bay.

"There was a Joseph Gallop, formerly assistant purser in the service of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company," continued the Man of Fate, "who married, nine months ago, a certain widow at Shadwell. He was turned out of the service, and he married her because she had a prosperous lodging-house."

"Oh—h!" cried Lotty. "You villain! You thought to live upon my earnings, did you? You put me up to pretend to be somebody else. Miss Holland!"

she fell upon her knees, literally and simply, and without any theatrical pretence at all—"forgive me! I am properly punished. Oh, he is made of lies! He told me that the real Iris was dead and buried, and he was the rightful heir; and as for you"—she sprang to her feet and turned upon her husband—"I know it is true. I know it is true—I can see it within your guilty eyes."

"If you have any doubt," said Lala, "here is a copy of the marriage-certificate."

She took it, read it, and put it in her pocket. Then she went out of the room without another word, but with rage and revenge in her eyes.

Joseph followed her, saying no more. He had lost more than he thought to lose. But there was still time to escape, and he had most of the money in his pocket.

But another surprise awaited him.

The lady from Shadwell, in fact, was waiting for him outside the door. With her were a few Shadwell friends, of the seafaring profession, come to see fair play. It was a disgraceful episode in the history of Chester Square. After five minutes or so, during which no welsker on a race-course was ever more hardly used, two policemen interfered to rescue the man of two wives, and there was a procession all the way to the police-court, where, after several charges of assault had been preferred and proved against half-a-dozen mariners, Joseph was himself charged with bigamy, both wives giving evidence, and committed for trial.

His old friend, Mr. David Chalker, one is sorry to add, refused to give bail, so that he remained in custody, and will now endure hardness for a somewhat lengthened period.

"Clara," said Arnold, "Iris will stay with you, if you ask her. We shall not marry, my dear, without your permission. I have promised that already, have I not?"

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